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Kashmir Flycatcher
Pale Rock Sparrow
Ernst Schäfer



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FRONT COVER: Kashmir Flycatcher *Ficedula subrubra*. Ooty, Tamil Nadu. February 2012.

BACK COVER: Sri Lanka Bay Owl *Phodilus assimilis*. Thattekad, Kerala. March 2010.

PHOTOGRAPHER: Ramki Sreenivasan / Conservation India

The female/first winter Kashmir Flycatcher *Ficedula subrubra*: an identification conundrum

Prasad Ganpule

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Introduction

The Kashmir Flycatcher *Ficedula subrubra* is endemic to the Indian Subcontinent. It is a Red Data species categorised as Vulnerable (BirdLife International 2011). It breeds in the Kashmir area and Pir Panjal Range (Bates & Lowther 1952; Henry 1955; Roberts 1992), and is known to winter in the Western Ghats and Sri Lanka (Zarri & Rahmani 2004b).

At c. 0900 hrs on 2 January 2009, in a patchwork habitat comprising cultivation, scattered trees, and scrub near Morbi, Rajkot district, Gujarat (22°49'N, 70°50'E) I heard a loud and clear bird call: "sweet-sweet," similar to the call of an Indian Robin *Saxicoloides fulicata*. The calling bird was perched on a *Prosopis juliflora* shrub. After one minute, the call was repeated. When I approached closer to the songster, it uttered the call again, and took off from its perch, uttering a "tit-tee," call in flight; in such a way that no time seemed to have elapsed between the two calls. The bird then settled on a new perch and repeated the first call three or four times. It then changed its perch again uttering the second call as soon as it took off. This was uttered rapidly and sounded like the "tic," call of a Red-breasted Flycatcher *Ficedula parva*. I thought that the second call was uttered twice but both notes differed from the call of *parva*. The entire call-cycle sounded like "sweet-sweet-tit-tee."

The bird generally perched on a *P. juliflora* and repeatedly made short sallies for insects. I was surprised to see that it resembled *parva*, but I had never heard one uttering such a call before.

Observations

The bird in question had orange spotting/mottling on the breast, which was almost absent on its white throat, extending up to the flanks. It had a white belly. It had darker/blackish wings, grey on the sides of the neck, and dark brownish upperparts. The tail and rump were completely black. It had a greyish-black bill with a pale base to the lower mandible. The bill looked slightly longer and stronger than the bill of a typical *parva*. I took numerous photographs, referred books, and *prima facie* identified the bird as a female Kashmir Flycatcher based on the call and other identification features. This bird is henceforth referred to as Bird A.

On 24 November 2010, while bird watching near home, my attention was drawn to a flycatcher similar to Bird A. I observed it closely, took extensive notes, and lots of photographs. It was confiding and allowed close views. It was seen in the area until 12 December 2010. This sighting was c. 100 m from the location of the above sighting. It is henceforth referred to as Bird B.

A third individual, Bird C, was seen from 5 December 2010 onwards. A fourth, Bird D, a juvenile/first winter bird was seen from 15 December 2010 onwards. A fifth, Bird E, also a juvenile/first winter bird was seen in the same area from 5 November 2011 onwards. And a sixth, Bird F, again a juvenile/first winter bird, was seen in the same area from 15 November 2011 onwards. Table 1 gives a description of the all these individuals, including plumage, bill details, and vocalization transcriptions.

Table 1. Morphological characters and vocal transcriptions of six Kashmir Flycatchers *Ficedula subrubra*

Individual birds	Plumage	Bill	Vocalisation
A	Orange spotting / mottling on breast, almost absent on the white throat, extending up to the flanks; white belly; darker / blackish wings, grey on the sides of the neck, and dark brownish upperparts; tail and rump completely black.	Greyish-black bill with a pale base to the lower mandible	"Sweet-sweet"; "tit-tee" call in flight; entire call-cycle sounded like "sweet-sweet-tit-tee."
B	Dark greyish sides of neck, rufous wash on breast extending to flanks; upper parts dark brownish (with a tinge of olive); black tail, wings, and rump; showed a black border from near the neck up to the alula, bordering the grey to the sides of the neck seen when observed closely.	Completely yellow lower mandible	"Eep eep eep" and the rattle call.
C	Wash on breast tawnier; grey sides to the neck diminished; On scrutiny scaled effect apparent on the rufous wash.	Dark greyish with a reduced pale base to lower mandible	"Eep eep eep" and rattle call.
D	Variably orange-washed throat, breast, and flanks; wash appeared mottled when seen closely; slight rufous wash was also apparent on flanks; from a distance the breast appeared greyish with a slight orange wash and the scaled effect not visible; upperparts dark brownish with a faint greater covert wing bar; tail black.	Dark brownish with a distinctly yellowish base to the lower mandible.	"Eep eep eep" and the rattle call.
E	Showed greater covert wing bar; black tail with black upper-tail coverts; black rump, grey sides of neck, dark brownish upperparts; rufous wash on the underparts with a slight scaling effect; no rufous on white throat.	Prominently pale yellowish base to lower mandible	"Eep eep eep" and the rattle call. A new call heard this year was a soft "chrit chrit"
F	Showed greater covert wing bar; black tail with black upper-tail coverts; black rump, grey sides of neck, dark brownish upperparts; faint rufous wash with no scaling effect; no rufous on white throat.	Dark greyish bill with reduced pale base to lower mandible	"Eep eep eep" and the rattle call. A new call heard this year was a soft "chrit chrit"

Discussion

While an adult male Kashmir Flycatcher is easily identified, the field identification of a female is rather difficult. It also depends on ambient weather and light, which affect the saturation of colours. I noted that the rufous wash appears fainter when the bird is seen in direct sunlight (Fig. 6, Bird A), and darker in shade or at certain angles. This could lead to further confusion in identification. Thus, good, and several views are needed to determine the extent and strength of the wash on the underparts for correct identification.

The birds I saw did not exactly match any of the illustrations shown in pertinent works (Legge 1983; Roberts 1992; Ali & Ripley 1996; Grimmett *et al.* 1998; Kazmierczak 2000; Ali 2002; Zari & Rahmani 2004a; Rasmussen & Anderton 2005; Taylor 2006), which have differences in the art work, and textual descriptions for a female Kashmir Flycatcher, as they have in those of a first winter male.

The main pointers to identifying a female Kashmir Flycatcher, as given in published texts, are as follows (all figures refer to Bird A):

1. It has a variable rufous wash on its breast, a whitish belly, and throat, with breast and upper flanks variably mottled rufous. The rufous is more pronounced on the breast than on the throat (Fig. 1.)
2. The rufous wash is continued to the flanks and it has pronounced grey sides to the neck (Fig. 2).
3. It has a black rump (Fig. 3).
4. It has a black tail, which is darker than the back (Figs 4, 5).

I then searched for and collected photographs of the species. An image of a female Kashmir Flycatcher taken in February 1995 in Sri Lanka shows a faint orange-grey wash on the breast. It



Fig. 1.



Fig. 2.



Fig. 3.



Fig. 4.



Fig. 5.



Fig. 6.

also shows faint rufous flanks. Its bill looks pale with a distinctly yellow lower mandible. Other features are consistent with textual descriptions (see above). Two more images of a female from Sri Lanka were put up recently on the OBI website (<http://orientalbirdimages.org>). The bird in these images has a faint rufous wash on the breast and flanks, and the bill is completely yellow. Its other features like a black tail, grey sides of neck, and browner upperparts are consistent with standard descriptions.

Given these different descriptions, it is indeed difficult to identify the female Kashmir Flycatcher with certainty in the field. Along with variably washed and mottled rufous underparts, it may have a variable bill colour. It may be noted that its bill looks slightly longer, stronger and more pointed than the bill of a typical *parva*. These features should be considered while identifying the bird in the field.

Going by the different descriptions in the books cited above it seems possible that the Kashmir Flycatcher has a variable bill colour between sexes and ages.

My conclusion that Bird A, which I saw for 15–20 min, was indeed a female Kashmir Flycatcher was based not only on plumage descriptions, but also on its call/song (as described in Grimmett *et al.* 1998, *etc.*), and pale base to bill (Fig. 7), which was not at all like that of *parva*.

Bird B could be identified as a first winter male based on completely yellow lower mandible (Fig. 8), and the rufous wash on breast extending onto the flanks. A first winter male is unmistakable if the characteristic black border to the rufous breast is seen. Bird C was possibly a first winter female based on its tawnier underparts with scaled effect (Fig. 9). For Bird D, the scaled effect on the throat and breast (Fig. 10) is as shown in Grimmett *et al.* (1998; Pl. 101: 2b), and is diagnostic of a female/first winter Kashmir Flycatcher. Birds E and F were first winter birds and could not be visually sexed with certainty.

All six birds had some differences in the colour of their bills, and in the extent of rufous wash on their underparts. Thus it is very difficult to arrive at any firm conclusion with respect to the bill colour and the amount of wash on the underparts with the data available to me, and might be prudent to describe both as 'variable'. More data and observations of different individuals are needed to arrive at any conclusion regarding this.

According to Cederroth *et al.* (1999), "In all plumages, the longest upper tail coverts of *F. albicilla* are invariably blackish or black (finely tipped brown when fresh) and are darker than the tail, whereas in *F. parva* they are generally medium brown or dull, dark grey-brown, concolourous with or paler than the tail. Only rarely does *parva* show blackish-brown or blackish upper tail coverts (mostly in older males, which anyway are easily told)." In the six individuals of *subrubra* that I observed, the upper tail coverts were black and concolourous with the black tail, which can be seen for the Bird C (Fig. 13). When observed closely, this bird showed concolourous black upper tail coverts, which were finely tipped brown, similar to *albicilla*. Since this feature is rarely shown by *parva*, this might also be a good indicator in the identification of *subrubra*. Cederroth *et al.* (1999) further state that, "Female and first-winter *albicilla* have rather a clean whitish throat (with few exceptions) and are dull, greyish-tinged dusky-brown on the breast and flanks, with a variable but mostly faint warm buff tinge. In contrast, *parva* is a warmer and paler colour beneath, usually pale buff or saturated cream-coloured without a contrastingly white throat," which is again different from female and first winter *subrubra*.

A detailed record was kept of all the sightings along with observations of each bird's behaviour and other details like voice. Plumage details were recorded with a large number of photos taken with a Nikon D40x (10 mp) digital SLR camera and a Sigma 170–500 mm lens. Information of my sightings of Kashmir Flycatchers is given in Table 2.



Fig. 7.



Fig. 9.



Fig. 8.



Fig. 10.

Birds C, D, E, and F were definitely winter visitors since they were seen in the same area for practically the entire season, holding onto their territories for the entire period. 'B' was probably a passage migrant as it was seen only for 19 days.

Vocalisations

The call/song of the first bird is given above. The calls of the other birds are described in Table 1. Other calls included a difficult-to-describe soft, throaty "krrrv," and a 'small' throaty sound uttered by Bird B. The birds also uttered a soft "chack," or a "chit," note when changing perch. Bird D uttered only the "trrr," call along with a "chit...chit...trr," and a "chack" call. I did not hear the "sweet-sweet-tit-tee" call/song for other birds. It could be possible that the calls of both the male and the female Kashmir Flycatcher are similar.

The vocalisations of a Kashmir Flycatcher as transcribed in the reference books also vary a little and are given in Table 3.

I only heard the 'complex' call described in Zarri & Rahmani (2004b) once (uttered by Bird B), and it is as described, and audible only from a short distance from the bird.

The song is described as a "sweet-sweet-did-he?" in all the reference books. This song is apparently heard only in its breeding areas in summer, but I heard it during the winter season from Bird A.

I observed that Bird C and Bird D used the same perches every evening before roosting. The roosting sites of the two birds were around 50 m apart. Bird C uttered the "chip chip chip + rattle" call for almost five minutes every evening. It flicked its wings and tail, described as 'flickering of wings' in Zarri & Rahmani (2004a), when uttering this call. Its throat bulged a little, and it dipped its tail when uttering the "chip chip chip" call. Sometimes the "chip chip chip" call was uttered for a very short time. Bird D uttered only the "trrr..trr..trr" call (rattle call) before roosting and did not utter the "chip chip chip" call but it did flick its wings and tail while uttering the call. It is possible that the juvenile birds may not vocalise much with the "chip chip chip" call. However, I observed for the first time the fourth bird uttering the "chip chip chip" call while feeding at c. 1300 hrs on 20 February 2011, and only twice thereafter.

Table 2. Sighting records of Kashmir Flycatchers

Individual	First seen on	Last seen on	Number of birds	Total number of days
Bird A	2 January 2009	2 January 2009	1	1
Bird B	24 November 2010	12 December 2010	1	19
Bird C	5 December 2010	14 March 2011	1	100
Bird D	15 December 2010	6 March 2011	1	82
Bird E	5 November 2011	20 March 2012	1	137
Bird F	15 November 2011	23 March 2012	1	130
Total			6	

Table 3. Vocalisation transcriptions of Kashmir Flycatchers

Source	Vocalisations
Rasmussen & Anderton (2005)	Dry, quiet rattle (with the first notes slightly offset) along with a winsome "wip", alternated with a dry "tch".
Grimmett <i>et al.</i> (1998)	A sharp "chack" and a rattling "purr" similar to the calls of <i>F. parva</i> .
Taylor (2006)	Low, dry rattle; a sharp "chak"; a "wip", sometimes alternated with a dry "tch".
Ali & Ripley (1996); Roberts (1992); Kazmierczak (2000)	A sharp "chack", "purr", "chip-chip-chip + rattle"
Zarri & Rahmani (2004b)	"Chit...trr..rr..chit" or "chrit chrit" and a "whip whip whip" and complex calls while resting.

The roosting time was around ten minutes after sunset. The birds would become active c. 10–15 min before sunrise when they would utter the "trrr..trr..trr" call. Bird C sometimes also uttered the "chip chip chip" call while becoming active. For Bird C, I was able to observe that for the last three days, its roosting behaviour changed. It uttered its usual call for only a very short time (only for about 30 seconds approximately) and it continued feeding almost up to its roosting time. However, the bird was not shy before its return migration as stated in Zarri and Rahmani (2004b) and allowed close views till the last.

Sonograms

I analysed the calls uttered by Bird C before it roosted, using 'Raven Lite' (Charif *et al.* 2006) for sonograms.

I compared the "trrr" rattle call of *subrubra* (Fig. A) with the one in Rasmussen & Anderton (2005), and found them to be similar. These sonograms were then compared with those of *parva*'s rattle calls (Krabbe 1988; Svensson *et al.* 2005; Harrop 2009; Poelstra 2011). Again they were similar. I found that it is difficult to distinguish *subrubra* from *parva* based on the sonograms of their rattle calls.

I have heard calls of both *subrubra* and *parva* in detail and sometimes I felt that the rattle of *parva* is a little bit softer (but difficult to say). I may have missed subtle differences that would be revealed with better recording equipment and superior editing software. While *parva* and *albicilla* can be differentiated based on their rattle calls (Svensson *et al.* 2005), the same cannot be said for *subrubra* and *parva*.

Fig. B is a sonogram of the "eep eep" ("chip chip chip") call, and shows two distinct notes. A lower pitched one at c. 3.2 kHz and a higher one at 6.8–7 kHz. A comparison was made with the sonogram of the similar "tseep tseep" call of *parva* (van de Meulengraaf 2009; van Oosten 2010), and revealed a distinct difference between the sonograms. The sonogram of *subrubra* contains higher pitch note, which is absent in *parva*. The sonograms for *parva* of the "tseep tsee" call do not contain the higher pitch note seen in *subrubra*. A weak higher pitch note may sometimes be present (Aberg 2008a) but it differs from that of *subrubra*. Both calls sound remarkably similar to us. Thus, it could be possible to differentiate between *subrubra* and *parva* based on the sonograms of this call.

I further recorded calls of Bird E and Bird F. Calls included the "eep eep eep" and the rattle call. A new call heard this year was a soft "chrit chrit" when the two birds were chasing each other. Sonograms of the rattle call and the "eep eep" call for both the birds were made and analysed. They were the same for both, as obtained the previous year (Figs A, B).

The sonogram of the "chrit chrit," call is given in Fig. C. A similar loud "chree," call of *parva* is quite different from the soft "chrit chrit," of *subrubra* and the sonogram of the "chree," call (Aberg 2008b) also differs from the sonogram of the "chrit chrit," call. Sonograms of the "chrit chrit," and "eep eep," calls could be an important indicator in the identification of the female and first winter Kashmir Flycatcher. More studies will be helpful in providing further evidence of this.

However it is important to note that the calls were recorded for only three individuals. More recordings, especially of the 'complex' call, the "chip chip chip," call, the rattle call and the song of *subrubra* need to be made and analysed, and sonograms compared with those of *parva*, to assess whether the two can be separated on the basis of these calls.

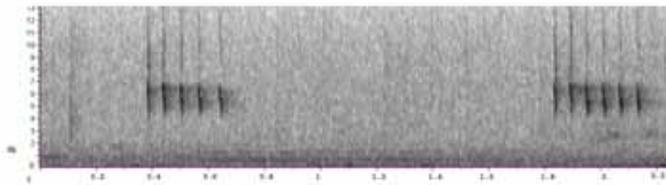


Fig. A. The "trrr" call

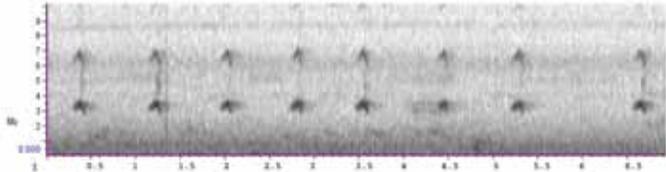


Fig. B. The "eep eep" call

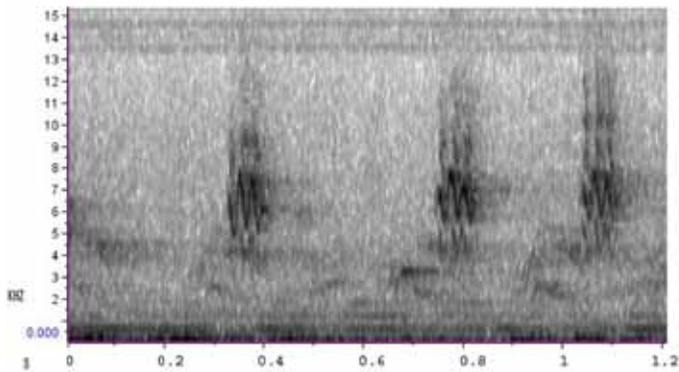


Fig. C. The "chrit chrit" call

Tail-fanning behaviour

The general behaviour of Kashmir Flycatchers seen here was as per Zari & Rahmani (2004b), and similar to that of *parva*. They took flying insects from near the ground and also frequently dropped to the ground. They kept to the lower parts of bushes and trees. They cocked the tail and drooped the wings.

I also observed *subrubra* deliberately fanning its tail, once or twice in 15 min, for less than one second. It would cock up its tail fan it slightly, and when it brought the tail downwards, fan it completely open. The fully fanned black tail was striking. This behaviour is difficult to photograph, but I was able to do so for Bird C (Figs 11–13), and D (Fig. 14). I also observed this behaviour in birds B, E, and F. The birds did not flick their wings while fanning their tails thus.

This behaviour is not, I think, described in literature, and might probably be a good way to separate the female/first winter *subrubra* from a female/first winter *parva* or *albicilla*, as there do not seem to be any published reports of such a tail-fanning behaviour in these species. I feel that tail fanning is such a visible behaviour that it would have been noticed and described if the latter two indulged in it. However, during the breeding season in Poland, *parva* males expose "white tail patches and shakes tail," categorised as aggressive display in 10% of cases when exposed to models of conspecific intruders accompanied by song playback (Mitrus 2007). This could be a description of the tail fanning behaviour described above. Thus it is possible that adult *parva* males may fan their tails occasionally. However it seems that this behaviour is seen during the breeding season and not during its wintering here as I could not find any published reference of this behaviour. And an adult *parva* male is unlikely to be confused with a female/first winter *subrubra*.



Fig. 11.



Fig. 12.



Fig. 13.



Fig. 14.

Henry (1955) states that, "It has a habit of jerking the tail well above the back, in a spasmodic manner, at the same time flicking the wings, and uttering a curious little creaking rattle." Harrison (1999) says, "Flycatches from low perch, also feeds on ground hopping around flicking wings and tail showing the white tail panels." This may be a description of the tail fanning behaviour discussed above or it may be 'flickering of wings and tail' referred to in Zari & Rahmani (2004a); but the tail fanning is difficult to miss. I believe it is a description of the 'flickering of wings and tail' that is given in these books, which is a normal behaviour for *subrubra* and it is not a description of tail fanning behaviour.

I watched *subrubra* fan its tail when other small birds were very near to it while it was feeding. I also observed this behaviour when no other birds were nearby—could it be a territorial display?

Birds B, C, and D fed along with Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides*, Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*, Blyth's Reed-Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum*, Sykes's Warbler *Hippolais rama*, and Ashy Prinia *Prinia socialis* in different areas, separately, but were themselves chased away by a female Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros* from its feeding territory. The wintering pair bond (Zari & Rahmani 2004b) was not observed here, even though the Birds B and C were together in the same area for one week. Both individuals remained separated, and fed separately. Birds C and D were together for a longer time but again they did not appear to form a pair. The same was with E and F. It is possible that only adult birds pair in winter, while first winter birds, winter alone. The birds allowed close views and were quite confiding.

Conclusion

There are no earlier records of the Kashmir Flycatcher from Gujarat (Rasmussen & Anderton 2005; Grimmett *et al* 1998), but it is possible that it may be a passage migrant or a rare winter visitor here. Ali & Ripley (1996) state that it migrates through the Peninsula in September and October with an old record from Dhulia, (north-western Maharashtra), being the closest to Gujarat, though Prasad (2004) states that this record could probably be from Dhule District, Andhra Pradesh. In Roberts (1992), there is a record of an adult male from Haleji Lake, near Karachi, Pakistan, while on spring passage. This sighting is also relatively close to Gujarat. Hence it is possible that the Kashmir Flycatcher might occur in Gujarat during autumn, and spring migrations.

I saw the first bird on 2 January 2009, which is too late for its autumn passage, and too early for the spring passage. It is more indicative of a wintering bird. Bird B was seen from 24 November 2010 to 12 December 2010, C from 5 December 2010 onwards, and D from 15 December 2010, which are all indicative of wintering birds. E and F were also wintering birds.

Though the female/first winter Kashmir Flycatcher is difficult to identify, its song and call is unique, and it can be an easy way of finding and identifying this species. I request all birdwatchers to look out for and photograph this enigmatic species, especially female/first winter birds, in its known wintering grounds in the Western Ghats / the Nilgiri plateau (Zari 2003; Zari & Rahmani 2005) or Sri Lanka, or in its breeding grounds in Kashmir and surrounding areas. Other winter records for the species are from Ooty in the Western Ghats (Harrap & Redman 1990; Karthikeyan & Athreya 1993).

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Pale Rock Sparrow *Carpospiza brachydactyla* in Gopalpura Hills, Tal Chhapar (Churu district, Rajasthan): a new species for the Indian Subcontinent

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Poonia, S. S., Sharma, M., & Sangha, H. S., 2012. Pale Rock Sparrow *Carpospiza brachydactyla* in Gopalpura Hills, Tal Chhapar (Churu district, Rajasthan): a new species for the Indian Subcontinent. *Indian BIRDS* 7 (6): 159–160.
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Pale Rock Sparrow *Carpospiza brachydactyla* (Fig. 1) is 'a rather featureless and dull sandy bunting or lark-like bird,' (Clement *et al.* 1999). It 'has diagnostic combination of rather short but strong and slightly bulbous bill, long, narrow outer wings with pale secondary-panel and double wing-bar, pale edges and white tips to tail (particularly obvious from below), and bright legs,' (Cramp *et al.* 1994). Juvenile birds are browner above and buff below (Beaman & Madge 1998). The species is known to breed in the Middle-East up to Iranian Baluchistan (Meinertzhagen 1954; Rasmussen & Anderton 2005). The species is not listed from the Indian Subcontinent in Ripley (1961), Ali & Ripley (1987), and Grimmett *et al.* (1998, 2011), nor for the Oriental region in Inskipp *et al.* (1996). Kazmierczak (2000) states that it is not known to occur in the Indian subcontinent though it may occur in Pakistan. Specimens have been collected from Shindand, and Adreskan, in Afghanistan in April and May (Vielliard 1969; Rasmussen & Anderton 2005).

On 15 February 2012, between 1100 and 1130 hrs, SSP observed a mixed flock of 200–250 sparrow-like birds in the Gopalpura Hills (27°44'24"N, 74°20'24"E), adjoining Tal Chhapar Wildlife Sanctuary in Churu district, Rajasthan, India (Fig. 2). On closer observation it was discovered that the flock comprised



Fig. 1. Pale Rock Sparrow *Carpospiza brachydactyla*. Photo: S. S. Poonia.



Fig. 3. Pale Rock Sparrow *Carpospiza brachydactyla* feeding among stones on the ground.

House Sparrows *Passer domesticus* and up to 50 individuals of another passerine species. SSP photographed the latter, and sent the pictures to MS for identification. The photographed birds showed pale sandy-brown upperparts with buff edges to coverts and secondaries. Underparts and flanks were buffish. The wings were long, reaching well beyond the upper tail coverts. The birds had a poorly-defined pale buff supercilium, and a pale sub-moustachial stripe. Their legs were pinkish. The flesh-coloured bulbous beak seemed strong, finch-like, with some birds showing a prominent pinkish lower mandible, and a hint of a gape, indicating these birds to be juveniles. Based on these features, MS identified the birds as Pale Rock Sparrows.

When first spotted, the Pale Rock Sparrows were feeding on the ground, lark-like in behaviour (Fig. 3), occasionally perching on broken rocks, or flying into small trees (Fig. 4) and bushes, along with the House Sparrow flock, when flushed. Other birds seen in the vicinity were Variable Wheater *Oenanthe picata*, Red-tailed Wheater *O. chrysopygia*, Rufous-fronted Prinia *Prinia buchanani*, Indian Bushlark *Mirafra erythroptera*, and Black-crowned Sparrowlark *Eremopterix nigriceps*. However, the Pale Rock Sparrows were only interacting with House Sparrows, with which they were actively feeding. SSP suspects having seen



Fig. 2. Gopalpura Hills near Tal Chhapar, Churu district, where the Pale Rock Sparrows were seen.

Photo: H. S. Sangha



Fig. 4. Pale Rock Sparrows occasionally flew up into trees.

the species in the same location on 27 January 2011 and had recorded this as an unconfirmed sighting of a 'petronia-like' bird in his diary.

This sighting of Pale Rock Sparrow is intriguing, as its recorded wintering range is western Saudi Arabia, and north-eastern Africa (Rasmussen & Anderton 2005; del Hoyo *et al.* 2009). However, Swinhoe (1882), and Paludan (1959) have mentioned wintering of the species in Kandhar (Afghanistan). It is possible that birds from the eastern limits of their summer breeding range winter in the Indian Subcontinent, and have probably been overlooked in the past. It is recommended that birdwatchers keep a sharp lookout for the Pale Rock Sparrow to obtain a clear picture of the species' status and distribution range in the Indian Subcontinent.

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Editor's note: Pale Rock Sparrow *Carpospiza brachydactyla* has also been reported from the Rann of Kachchh, Gujarat, by Jugal Kishore Tiwari, who spotted several birds on 27 January 2012. [Subhas Chandra N. S. in *Deccan Herald* dated 20 February 2012.]

Ernst Schäfer's comprehensive historical bird collection from Sikkim and Tibet at the Museum für Naturkunde Berlin

S. Frahnert, P. Eckhoff & J. Fiebig

Frahnert, S., Eckhoff, P., & Fiebig, J., 2012. Ernst Schäfer's comprehensive historical bird collection from Sikkim and Tibet at the Museum für Naturkunde Berlin. *Indian BIRDS* 7 (6): 160–161.

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The bird collection of the Museum für Naturkunde Berlin (ZMB) is, with more than 200,000 items, the largest in Germany. One collecting focus of this international collection is East and Southeast Asia. The ZMB holds extensive collections by Walter Beick [China: Sichuan, Qinghai, Gansu, 1926–1932; 859 specimens (Stresemann 1937)]; Gerd Heinrich (Iran, Indonesia, Myanmar, 1927–1938; > 3,500 specimens); Rudolf Mell (China: Guangdon, 1915–1921; ~1,200 specimens); and Hugo Weigold (China: different provinces, 1914–1919; ~1,500 specimens).

Beyond this collecting focus, there are only a few small collections from India. Among the oldest collections from India are those of Wilhelm F. G. Behn (coasts, and Nicobar Islands, 1845/1846), M. Lamare-Piquot (Bengal, 1821–1826), as well as the expedition of Prinz Waldemar von Preußen / Werner Hofmeister (India and the Himalayas, 1844–1846).

However, the largest collection of Indian birds in the ZMB is that of Ernst Schäfer, collected in Sikkim 1938/1939. Ernst Schäfer (1910–1992) was a German zoologist and hunter. He took part in three expeditions to Sikkim, and Tibet and adjacent

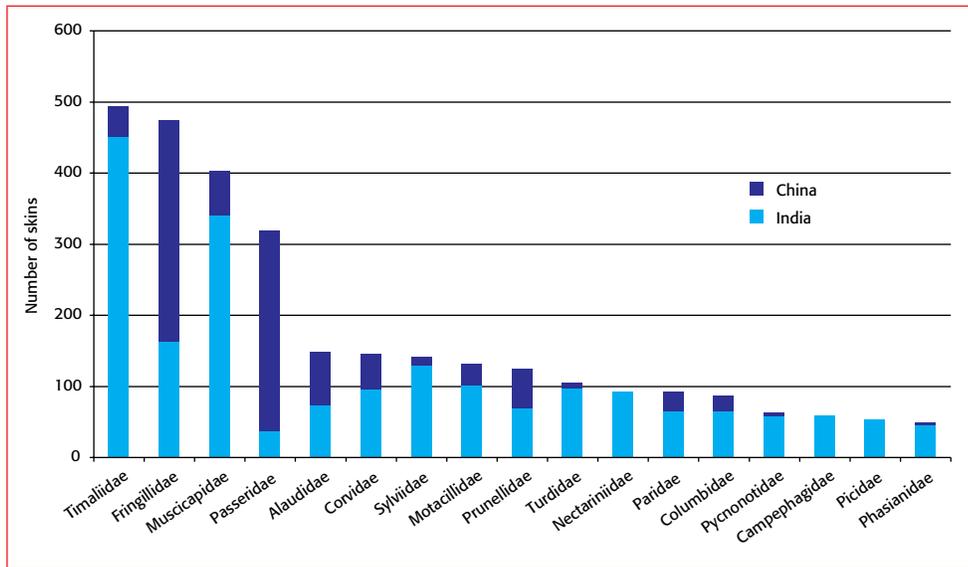


Fig. 1. Distribution of the skins of bird families from the collection of Schäfer's third expedition to Sikkim and Tibet (families with more than 50 skins; diagram modified from Abs *et al.* 2010a).

provinces in China. The first two expeditions (1931/1932, and 1934–1936) to Tibet and adjacent Chinese provinces were organised by the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia and guided by Brook Dolan (1908–1945). The third expedition (1938/1939) to Sikkim and Tibet was guided by E. Schäfer himself, and is burdened by its support from, and connections with, the political aims of the Third Reich (Haffer *et al.* 2000; Nowak 2005). While most of the birds collected during the first and second expeditions were integrated into the collections of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia (~ 3,000 skins), the entire collection of birds (besides eggs) from the third expedition was sent to the Museum für Naturkunde Berlin (~3,500 skins). Two-thirds of the birds, from all three expeditions, housed in the ZMB, comprising 2,400 skins of 278 species, were collected in India (especially Sikkim) in 1938, and in the first half of 1939 (Fig. 1). Due to the separation of the collecting routes of the individual expedition members the avifauna around Gangtok could be sampled throughout an entire year (nearly 1,000 skins).

The collection in Berlin has remained almost unknown due to the political circumstances of the expedition, and the

accession time of the collection at the museum, i.e., World War II. Erwin Stresemann, the curator of the ornithological collection that time, was especially interested in the taxonomy of Asian birds. He analysed the birds of the Schäfer expedition, described new subspecies (Stresemann 1939, 1940) for Sikkim, and prepared a manuscript of more than 100 pages about the entire collection. This manuscript was neither completed nor published (Haffer *et al.* 2000), but the data were cited by Ali (1962) for Sikkim, and Vaurie (1972) for Tibet. The collection of the about 3,500 skins remained stored separately for more than 60 years and it was catalogued to only a very small degree.

Recently the collections of Ernst Schäfer, from Sikkim and Tibet, at the Museum für Naturkunde Berlin, were completely catalogued, labelled, and systematically integrated into the main ornithological collection (Fig. 2). A catalogue was published in *Zoosystematics and Evolution* (Abs *et al.* 2010a, b). The catalogue provides detailed information about the species, sex, and age; as well as collecting locality and date of the skins. Species determination and locality names have been updated and geographical coordinates for the localities published for the first time. The specimens, as well as the manuscript of E. Stresemann, are now available for scientific studies in the Museum für Naturkunde Berlin.

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Fig. 2. A view of the collection of birds from the Schäfer expedition.

Photo: C. Radke, Museum für Naturkunde Berlin



Spotted Crane *Porzana porzana* sightings in Saurashtra, Gujarat, India

Ashok Mashru & Bhavesh Trivedi

Mashru, A., & Trivedi, B., 2012. Spotted Crane *Porzana porzana* sightings in Saurashtra, Gujarat. *Indian BIRDS* 7 (6): 162.
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On 6 February 2011 we were birdwatching at Ishwaria pond (4 km from Rajkot city), with the Rajkot unit of the Bird Conservation Society of Gujarat. In a reedy, grassy, patch adjoining the pond, BT spotted an unusual crane with lots of white spots on its body, and red at the base of its bill. The crane was walking there freely, unconcerned by the group of birdwatchers. We identified it with the help of Sonobe & Usui (1993) as the Spotted Crane *Porzana porzana*. We saw it again on 9 February 2011 at same place. It was photographed on both visits.

The bird has been sighted again by AM, and photographed, at the same place on 22 January 2012 (Fig. 1).

Viral Joshi had also seen the Spotted Crane c. 100 km south of Rajkot, at at Saladi pond near Amreli city (*pers. comm., verbally*), on 20 January 2011. At the same place, Viral Joshi saw it again on 7 December 2011. Chetan Vala photographed it on 2 January 2012, and Arpit Deomurari on 8 January 2012. Images of these sightings are on website 'Oriental Bird Images.'

The earliest record of a Spotted Crane from Gujarat is of a bird shot at Devisar Lake, Kachchh, in the winter of 1892 (Palin 1904). Dharmakumarsinhji points out that it is uncommon in Saurashtra, not very rare, but difficult to find. Rasmussen & Anderton (2005) state that it is a 'widespread passage migrant

and winter visitor mainly NW and NC plains with scattered records from the peninsula. It is scarce, or overlooked in region in shallow freshwater wetland with areas of dense reeds and grasses.'

Considering the scarcity of records of the Spotted Crane in Gujarat, these sightings, along with the photographs are an important record of the bird's winter distribution.

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Photo: Ashok Mashru

Fig. 1. Spotted Crane *Porzana porzana* at Ishwaria pond, 22 January 2012.

Status of Oriental White Ibis *Threskiornis melanocephalus* in Assam with notable recent records

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The Oriental White Ibis *Threskiornis melanocephalus* is a common bird of northern, western, and southern India, and has a wide global range extending from Pakistan to Myanmar, and sporadically to China and Japan (Ali & Ripley 1987; Soothill & Soothill 1989). It is listed as Near-threatened by BirdLife International (2009). In eastern India, it is relatively rare while farther east in Bangladesh and north-eastern India it is known only from sporadic records (Kazmierczak 2000). The White Ibis has been recorded as an uncommon local migrant in Assam (Choudhury 2000). There were only a handful of records from the state, mostly of small groups. Choudhury (2000) lists most of the past records. Here I report a recent sighting of a fairly large number of birds at Kaziranga, and also summarise their status in Assam.

During the last swamp deer *Cervus duvauceli* census in Kaziranga I was surprised to see larger flocks of Oriental White Ibis on 6 December 2007 (Fig. 1). I covered a small area of the park (a census block), encompassing Laodubi, Baghmari, and Goroimari areas. At Bhetoni *beel*, a marshy area, I counted two flocks of 20+ and 18+ birds, resting and preening at 1100 hrs. Earlier in the day, a lone bird was seen at Laodubi, and two at Eraltoli. All other sightings from the Brahmaputra Valley were of one to eight birds (Choudhury 2000), except those of Stevens

(1915) who stated that it was plentiful on the Brahmaputra River between Mangaldoi and Singrighat in March 1909.

There was, however, no record from the Barak Valley region of southern Assam till I sighted eight birds at Kukithal near Patharkandi in Karimganj district on 13 January 2004. All the records available with me are listed in the table.

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Photo: Anwaruddin Choudhury

Fig. 1. Oriental White Ibis *Threskiornis melanocephalus* in a marsh in Kaziranga National Park.

Date	Place	Number of birds	Remarks
15 December 1996	Pabitora Wildlife Sanctuary	4	By the author
1997	Agoratoli, Kaziranga National Park	7–8	B. Talukdar (pers. comm. in Choudhury 2000)
20 February 1998	Pabitora Wildlife Sanctuary	A few	K. Lahkar (pers. comm. in Choudhury 2000)
1995–97	Uriagaon, Nagaon dist.	1	The lone bird was seen on several occasions during those two years
1996	Rupahi pathar, Sivasagar dist.	8	(H. Singha, pers. comm. in Choudhury 2000)
December 1998	Sohola <i>beel</i> , Kaziranga National Park	4	B. Talukdar (pers. comm. in Choudhury 2000)
March 1999	Sohola <i>beel</i> , Kaziranga National Park	1	M. Barua (pers. comm. in Choudhury 2000)
13 January 2004	Kukithal near Patharkandi, Karimganj dist.	8	M. Barua (pers. comm. in Choudhury 2000)
6 December 2007	Laodubi, Kaziranga National Park	1	By the author
6 December 2007	Eraltoli <i>beel</i> , Kaziranga National Park	2	By the author
6 December 2007	Bhetoni <i>beel</i> , Kaziranga National Park	38+	By the author

Photographic record of Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus* from Singalila National Park, West Bengal

Sanjeeb Pradhan, Pemba Tshering Bhutia & Rajarshi Chakraborty

Sanjeeb, P., Bhutia, T., & Chakraborty, R., 2012. Photographic record of Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus* from Singalila National Park, West Bengal. *Indian BIRDS* 7 (6): 164.

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The Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus* is a widespread wader distributed across Europe, Asia, and North America, which winters in warm tropical oceans. The breeding adult has a white throat, and a red stripe down the side of its neck, while the non-breeding adult is mainly pied with dark grey upper parts and a black eye mask (Grimmett *et al.* 2006).

In India, the bird is a winter visitor, found mainly in the western (Gujarat) and south-eastern (Tamil Nadu) coastal waters of the country (Ali & Ripley 1995). Recent records from northern and north-western India indicate its presence in Haryana, where it is a scarce winter vagrant (Jay 1981); Kachchh in Gujarat (Varu 2005, 2010); Sambhar Lake, (Sangha 2009), and Keoladeo Ghana National Park, Bharatpur, in Rajasthan (Grewal 2012). From eastern and north-eastern India, Red-necked Phalarope is reported from Kaziranga National Park, Assam (Choudhury 2004), as well as West Bengal (Sen 2012a). Engel (2011) has reported it from Bhutan.

However, there is no photographic record of the bird from West Bengal, and the annotated checklist of Singalila National

Park (Sen 2012b) does not mention the species; so our sighting possibly provides the first photographic record of the bird from Singalila, and from West Bengal.

Singalila National Park (78.60 km²; 2400–3650 m asl) lies at the eastern part of the great Himalayan range, at the border of Sikkim, West Bengal, and Nepal. In its upper reaches it has mainly temperate vegetation comprising rhododendron, silver fir, and a variety of alpine shrubs and herbs.

On 15 September 2007, we had trekked up to Sandakphu, the highest point of Singalila National Park, and beyond towards Phalut, for a vegetation survey. The general elevation of the area was more than 3600 m and the vegetation consisted of dense thickets of rhododendron, a few scattered *Abies* spp., and blooming alpine herbs like *Senecio* spp., *Geranium* spp., and *Primula* spp., (Fig. 1). While crossing Sandakphu and walking a further kilometer towards Phalut, around 1100 hrs, we came across a large seasonal pond, swollen with monsoon downpour. Scanning its surface, we spotted a single Red-necked Phalarope in non-breeding plumage, swimming in the water (Fig. 2).

We were overjoyed, and photographed it from the edge of the pond; the murky weather and mist did not allow clear close-ups. During the three hours that we sampled vegetation in the area, the phalarope remained on the pond. Perhaps it was exhausted after a long flight from its arctic breeding grounds.



Fig. 1. General habitat of the sighting area.



Fig. 2. Phalarope at the pond near Phalut.

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Circumorbital skin- and eye-colour of young Indian Grey Hornbills *Ocyrceros birostris*

Raju Kasambe, Pravin Charde, J. L. Tarar & Anil Pimplapure

Kasambe, R., Charde, P., Tarar, J. L., & Pimplapure, A., 2012. Circumorbital skin- and eye-colour of young Indian Grey Hornbills *Ocyrceros birostris*. *Indian BIRDS* 7 (6): 165.

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We conducted a study of the ecology and breeding behaviour of Indian Grey Hornbills *Ocyrceros birostris* in Nagpur, central India, during 2007–2008, 2008–2009, and 2009–2010. Here we describe, for the first time, the colour of the eye and circumorbital skin of young Indian Grey Hornbills. On 4 July 2008, at 0830 hrs we photographed a sunning fledgling Indian Grey Hornbill in Maharajbagh Garden at Nagpur. On 28 June 2009 a fledgling was rescued from marauding House Crows *Corvus splendens* at Nagpur by Mr Minitesh Tapre, and was brought to the residence of the first author (RK) (Fig. 1). The fledgling had an injury and was in distress. It was treated, fed, and released into the wild on 3 July 2009. The adult hornbills were then seen feeding this fledgling in the afternoon. In the evening, the fledgling flew with the adult hornbills. Our descriptions of bare skin and iris colours are from these two birds and others observed in the wild.

The circumorbital skin colour of these two fledglings was dull orange. The eye colour was dark brown to black. According to Ali & Ripley (1983) in adult Indian Grey Hornbills the iris is brownish orange to red in male, and brown in female. According to Kemp (1995) the bare circum-orbital skin colour of the adult male is lead coloured. Eyes are red-brown to orange. The bare circumorbital skin colour is lead black in the male (Ali & Ripley 1983; Kemp 1995). Pittie (2003) first described the circumorbital skin colour

of an adult female as rich dark orange and, in the same note, mentioned that its irides were dark brown. Thus, this is the first description of the circumorbital skin colour of young Indian Grey Hornbills. The circumorbital skin colour of the young of Indian Grey Hornbill is not described in published literature (Ali & Ripley 1983; Kemp 1995; Pittie 2003). During the study period we noted the circumorbital skin colour of different fledglings on several occasions.

Acknowledgements

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Fig. 1. A rescued young Indian Grey Hornbill *Ocyrceros birostris* fledgling at Nagpur, central India.

Sighting of Green Imperial Pigeon *Ducula aenea* in Chandrapur district, Maharashtra

Veena P. G. & Prachi Mehta

Veena P. G., & Mehta, P., 2012. Sighting of Green Imperial Pigeon *Ducula aenea* in Chandrapur district, Maharashtra. *Indian BIRDS* 7 (6): 166.

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The Green Imperial Pigeon *Ducula aenea* is a large arboreal frugivore belonging to the Family Columbidae. Within India, it is distributed along the Western- and Eastern Ghats, Bihar, West Bengal, and north-eastern India. Outside India, it is widely distributed in Sri Lanka, Burma, North Thailand, and the Indo-Chinese region (Ali & Ripley 1987; Grimmett *et al.* 1999; Kazmierczak 2000; Rasmussen & Anderton 2005). The preferred habitat of the Green Imperial Pigeon is evergreen and moist-deciduous forests but it can be seen in secondary forests that have *Ficus* or other wild fruit trees (Ali & Ripley 1987).

From June to August 2008, we conducted a bird diversity survey in Lohara Reserved Forests in Chandrapur district (19°57'3"N, 79°22'24"E), located south of the Tadoba–Andhari Tiger Reserve in Maharashtra. On 23 July, we sighted a single Green Imperial Pigeon (Fig. 1) perched on a large fruit-laden leafy *Morinda tinctoria* tree, amidst an approximately 25 years old *Tectona grandis* plantation along with dry-deciduous trees such as *Terminalia alata*, *Diospyros melanoxylon*, *Madhuca longifolia*, *Xylia xylocarpa*, and *Lagerstroemia parviflora*.

The distribution of the Green Imperial Pigeon is restricted

to the south-eastern tip of Maharashtra (Grimmett *et al.* 1999; Kazmierczak 2000) covering some parts of Gadchiroli District (19°26'24"N, 80°31'12"E), which is about 130 km (aerial distance) away from the site where the Green Imperial Pigeon was recorded.

Further survey is required to determine if this sighting represents a vagrant or a resident population outside its known range.

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Photo: Veena P. G.

Fig. 1. Green Imperial Pigeon *Ducula aenea* in Chandrapur district, Maharashtra.

First record of Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris* from Kerala

P. C. Rajeevan, P. B. Biju & Jayan Thomas

Rajeevan, P. C., Biju, P. B., & Thomas, J., 2012. First record of Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris* from Kerala. *Indian BIRDS* 7 (6): 167.

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Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris* is a winter visitor to Peninsular India, but its distribution does not cover Kerala (Rasmussen & Anderton 2005; Sashikumar *et al.* 2010). This short note reports the sighting of this species from Madayippara (12°01'48"N, 75°15'36"E), Kannur district, Kerala with photographs.

Madayippara, located 22 km north of Kannur District HQ, is a large laterite hillock with sparse grass and open rocky areas. On 29 January 2011 at 1630 hrs, PCR and PBB observed a pipit (Motacillidae: *Anthus* sp.) near the south-western side of Madayippara. The bird was feeding on the ground. PBB photographed it and circulated the pictures among several bird-watchers (Fig. 1). The pipit was constantly wagging its tail, and uttered a 'plip' call when flushed. It was similar in size to a Blyth's Pipit *A. godlewskii*, which was present for ready comparison in

the same area. The photographs showed a pipit with a prominent whitish supercilium, pale mantle, streaked crown, faintly streaked breast, and reasonably well-marked median coverts with triangular or oval dark centres. The bill was broad based, straight, with a pink base. The lores appeared dark, and the bird showed a distinctly dark brown malar stripe, and an indistinct moustachial stripe. Most bird-watchers who saw the photographs concluded the bird was a Tawny Pipit.

PCR spotted another pipit belonging to the same species on the morning of 6 February 2011, c. 100 m from the first sighting. That same evening it was sighted there again, by PCR & JT, and photographed (Fig. 2). The photographs also showed a similar bird with an evenly dark loreal line extending through the eye to the rear. Upper parts were sandy brown with very few feathers with dark edges. The bird showed buff edges to flight feathers, contrasting pale buff edges to tertial feathers, and the median coverts showed differently contrasting pale edges. Rectrices were clearly buff. These photographs further confirmed the presence of this pipit at Madayippara for more than a week during this time of the year.

Compared to the Paddyfield Pipit *A. rufulus*, which we are very familiar with, this pipit had very few streaks on its breast and flanks; unlike the former, it had dark lores, sandy brown un-streaked mantle, and buff outer rectrices. Further, it had a wagtail-like jizz with a slightly longer tail, quite different from Paddyfield Pipit as well as the migrant Blyth's Pipit. Long-billed Pipit *A. similis*, which also have dark loreal line and buff rectrices, is much larger and sports a heavier bill. These field characteristics and further scrutiny of the photographs we took were enough to identify this bird as Tawny Pipit.

These sighting records though interesting, are not completely unexpected. This species is a regular, but scarce, winter migrant to the neighbouring areas in Karnataka, like Mysore, and Bangalore (Praveen J., *pers. comm.* February 2011) and similar vagrant sightings of a few species like Red-throated Pipit *A. cervinus*, Grey-necked- *E. buchanani*, Black-headed- *E. melanocephala*, and Red-headed- *E. bruniceps* Buntings have been recorded in recent years from the wetlands of northern Kerala (Sashikumar *et al.* 2011).

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Photo: P. B. Biju

Fig. 1. Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris*.



Photo: Jayan Thomas

Fig. 2. Tawny Pipit from Madayippara.

Tickell's Thrush *Turdus unicolor*: a new bird for Gujarat

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Ratanmahal Sloth Bear Sanctuary (20°32'N–20°35'N, 74°03'E–74°11'E) lies at the confluence of the Vindhya Range and the Malwa Plateau adjoining the state of Madhya Pradesh. With an average annual precipitation of c. 1000 mm, it harbours dry deciduous forests dominated by teak *Tectona grandis*, and some patches of moist deciduous biotopes with very little or no teak, and with luxuriant bamboo brakes (Singh 2001; Trivedi 2001).

Tickell's Thrush *Turdus unicolor* is endemic to the Indian Subcontinent and has a discontinuous breeding range from Pakistan through Kashmir to Nepal and western Bhutan (Grimmett *et al.* 1998; Clement *et al.* 2000; Clement 2009). It winters to south peninsular India (Clement 2009). It is a common summer visitor to the Himalayas from Chitral, east through Kashmir to Nepal and Sikkim (Ali & Ripley 1987). It winters to the east and south-east of its main breeding ground from Kangra along the foothills to Arunachal Pradesh and in peninsular India to eastern Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, north-eastern Andhra Pradesh, and southern Bengal (Ali & Ripley 1987). It is a straggler to Ladakh, Jacobabad, Sambhar Lake (Rajasthan), Mt. Abu (Rajasthan), Bharatpur (Rajasthan), and Khandala (Maharashtra) (Ali & Ripley 1987). A few pass through the north-western Indian plains (Rasmussen & Anderton 2005).

During a bird watching visit to Ratanmahal Sloth Bear Sanctuary in Gujarat (India) on 1–2 January 2011, I observed several Tickell's Thrushes (Fig. 1). This species has not been previously reported from Gujarat (Butler 1879; Ali 1954, 1955; Dharmakumarsinhji 1955; Monga & Naoroji 1983; Ali & Ripley 1987; Grimmett *et al.* 1998; Kazmierczak 2000; Rasmussen & Anderton 2005; Trivedi & Soni 2006), and hence this is the first documented record for Gujarat.

On 1 January 2011, at 1800 hrs, while nearing the Baldha campsite (22°34'55"N, 74°08'23"E) of Ratan Mahal Sloth Bear Sanctuary, I spotted a nondescript grey *Turdus* thrush perched on a stone in the bed of a small stream. The thrush was smaller than an Indian Blackbird *T. simillimus*, with an overall grey body, with brown upperparts, except for whitish underparts, and a distinctive, long bright yellow bill. It also had a whitish throat with indistinct malar stripes / streaks. This bird gave me the opportunity to click three–

four photographs, after which it flew off into a bush near the stream.

As I could not immediately identify it, based on my experience of other thrushes of Gujarat, I looked up Rasmussen & Anderton (2005), and realised that it resembled the Tickell's Thrush.

On 2 January 2011 I began searching for this thrush in the stream where I spotted one the previous evening, and came across five different individuals (one male, and four females) around the campsite's garbage dump. I could observe, and photograph them here at leisure, for proper identification.

The four female Tickell's Thrushes had an olive-brown upperpart, dark and streaked malar stripe, whitish throat, and breast with diffused spotting, but they lacked a supercilium. The male was in its first winter plumage, superficially resembling the female, but with a distinct grey cast to its rump and upper tail coverts, and graying wing coverts with pale tips. The feeding behaviour of these birds was typically that of the *Turdus* group, as they stop with head cocked on one side to listen for the insect larva and earthworms.

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Photo: Arpit Deomurari



Fig. 1. Tickell's Thrush *Turdus unicolor* photographed by the author at Ratanmahal Sloth Bear Sanctuary, Gujarat.

Records of the Ultramarine Flycatcher *Ficedula superciliaris* in Gujarat

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Mashru, A., 2012. Records of the Ultramarine Flycatcher *Ficedula superciliaris* in Gujarat. *Indian BIRDS* 7 (6): 169–170.
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The Ultramarine Flycatcher *Ficedula superciliaris* winters in 'central India from Delhi south to northern Maharashtra, Goa, southeastern Karnataka, northwestern Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, West Bengal and Bihar,' (Ali & Ripley 1996). There seem to be no records of the species from Gujarat prior to Khacher (1996). Dharmakumarsinhji (1955) does not include it in his work. Parasharya *et al.* (2004) merely include it in their checklist. Grimmett *et al.* (1999), and Rasmussen & Anderton (2005) do not list it from Gujarat. However, Kazmierczak (2000), and Grimmett *et al.* (2011) indicate its presence from the north-eastern tip of Gujarat. Subsequent stray records from the state are shown in Table 1.

On Sunday, 26 December 2010 Deepak Rindani, Atul Kalaria and I were birdwatching in the plantation area downstream of Nyari-I dam, Rajkot (Saurashtra, Gujarat). We spotted a small black-and-white bird on a kasid tree *Cassia siamea*, moving from branch to branch with great agility. I observed its white eyebrow, and the curved marking of the shoulder, over the white breast, and also observed once, its typical flycatcher-like behaviour. My first impression was that it was a chat, but when I referred to Grimmett *et al.* (2000), I realised immediately that it was a male Ultramarine Flycatcher *Ficedula s. superciliaris*, which was later confirmed from the photos taken by Deepak Rindani (Fig. 1).

On 15 January 2011 Bhavesh Trivedi and I returned to Nyari-I dam, and we saw the bird for 15 min and took photographs (Fig. 2).

The handful of records of the Ultramarine Flycatcher from Gujarat, listed in Table 1, and shown in Fig. 3, prove that it is a widespread vagrant in most regions of the state. Birdwatchers should be alert in winter for this flycatcher, as only further sightings will ascertain whether it is a regular migrant, and merits an extension of its wintering distribution range.

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Photo: Deepak Rindani

Fig. 1. Ultramarine Flycatcher *Ficedula superciliaris* photographed on 26.xii.2010.

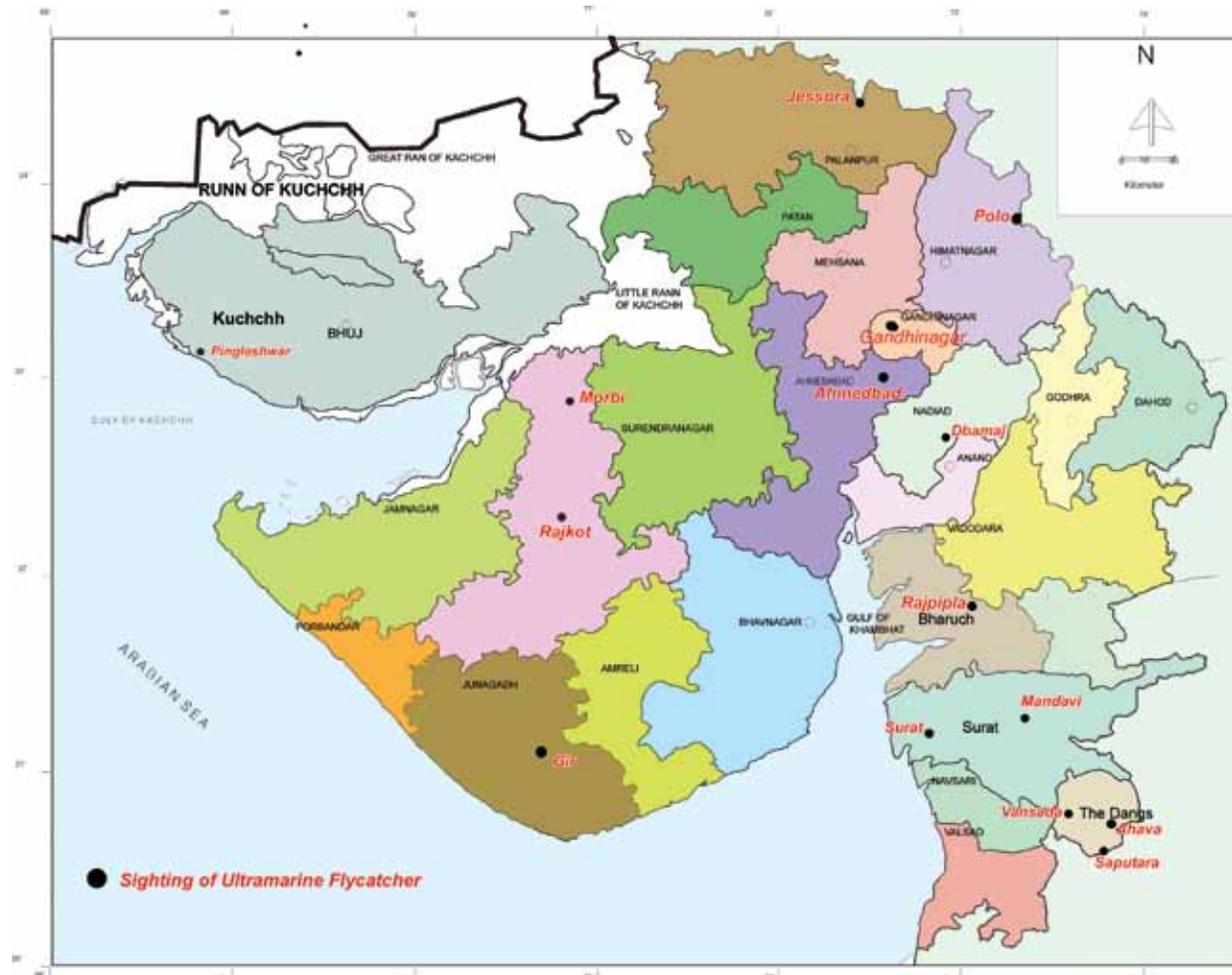


Photo: Ashok Mashru

Fig. 2. Ultramarine Flycatcher *Ficedula superciliaris* photographed on 15.i.2011.

Table 1. Records of Ultramarine Flycatcher *Ficedula supercilialis* in Gujarat

Location	Date of Observation	Observer	Source
Jessore Forest, Banaskantha & Hathmati River, NE of Ahmedabad	Not given	Lalsinhbhai Raol	Khacher (1996)
Jessore Forest, Banaskantha	1994	Bakul Trivedi	Trivedi (2000)
Gir Forest	1994	Sudha Mehta	Trivedi (2000)
Jessore Forest, Banaskantha	15 January 2000	Bakul Trivedi & Uday Vora	Trivedi (2000)
Polo Forest, Sabarkantha	Not given	Mayur Mistri	Trivedi (2000)
Indroda Park, Gandhinagar	January 2007	Bharat Jethva	Pers. comm., verbally
Ratanmahal Wildlife Sanctuary	20 February 2007	Bakul Trivedi	Anon. (2007)
Morbi, Rajkot district	4 October 2007	Prasad Ganpule	Pers. comm., verbally
Dharmaj, Petlad taluk, Anand district	19 February 2008	Yagnesh Bhatt	Anon. (2009)
Coastal area Pingleshwar Temple, near Nalia, Kachchh	30 October 2008	J. K. Tiwari	Tiwari (2010)
Ahva, Dang district	5 January 2009	Arpit Devmurari	Pers. comm., verbally
Dharmaj, Petlad taluka, Anand district	15 January 2009	Yagnesh Bhatt	Pers. comm., verbally
Dharmaj, Petlad taluka, Anand district	28 January 2010	Yagnesh Bhatt	Anon. (2010)
Surat	12 February 2010	Mukesh Bhatt	Pers. comm., verbally
Saputara, Dang district	11 December 2010	Arpit Deomurari	Pers. comm., verbally
Vansda National Park	19 December 2010	Mukesh Bhatt	Pers. comm., verbally
Nyari-I dam, Rajkot	26 December 2010	Ashok Mashru, D. Rindani & A. Kalaria	Authors' sighting
Nyari-I dam, Rajkot	15 January 2011	Ashok Mashru & Bhavesh Trivedi	Authors' sighting
Mandavi, Surat	23 January 2011	Mukesh Bhatt	Pers. comm., verbally
Morbi, Rajkot district	2 to 25 November 2011	Prasad Ganpule	Pers. comm., verbally

Fig. 3. Records of Ultramarine Flycatcher *Ficedula supercilialis* in Gujarat.

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Wallcreeper *Tichodroma muraria* in Gajner, Bikaner district, Rajasthan: a new record for the Thar Desert

Harkirat Singh Sangha

Sangha, H. S., Wallcreeper *Tichodroma muraria* in Gajner, Bikaner district, Rajasthan: a new record for the Thar Desert. *Indian BIRDS* 7 (6): 171.
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On 19 February 2011 while watching waterfowl from Gajner Palace on the embankment of the lake, in Bikaner district, Rajasthan I noticed a bird landing on the embankment just above the water. It was a pleasant surprise to see the unmistakable Wallcreeper *Tichodroma muraria* foraging on the stone embankment just above the water. I identified the bird immediately, having seen it on many occasions, and at several locations in the Himalayas and their foothills. After 15–20 seconds it flew up and was lost from view.

The Wallcreeper is probably Eremian (of the arid Palaearctic) in origin, found in temperate, boreal, and steppe climatic zones and mountain regions of south Palaearctic. Typical haunts in winter are rock faces, including quarries and sea cliffs, earth and clay banks or cliffs, newly built road cuttings, and buildings such as churches, cathedrals, and ruins (del Hoyo *et al.* 2004).

The species has not been recorded previously from the Thar Desert in western Rajasthan although Kazmierczak (2000) has shown isolated record(s) from Bharatpur in eastern Rajasthan. In recent years the species has been recorded irregularly from three sites in Bharatpur district. Harish Sharma, a local bird guide from Bharatpur and a group of birders saw a Wallcreeper while they were watching Long-billed Vultures *Gyps indicus* on the ramparts of Bayana Fort near Bharatpur on 5 December 2007. A few days later another local guide, Ansar Khan, also saw the bird at the same site. A Wallcreeper was seen foraging in the moat of Bharatpur Fort by Goverdhan, a local bird guide, three–four years ago (Harish Sharma *pers. comm.*). Gajender, bird guide in Bharatpur, saw a Wallcreeper at Ban Baretha near Bharatpur in c. February 2006 (*pers. comm.*).

Although Gajner is approximately 500 km from the Himalayas the sighting is not really exceptional. The species is an altitudinal and, to some extent, a short distance migrant, wintering mainly within the breeding range and adjoining areas. Some individuals, however, move up to several hundred kilometers from their nesting area, and in such cases, may even return to the previous years' wintering site. The species has straggled to England, Channel Islands, north France, north Germany, Portugal, islands in the Mediterranean, Iraq, Syria, Jordan, Morocco, and Algeria. Individuals wintering in Morocco would need to complete a journey, presumably from the Pyrenees, of some 960 km. While the sole record for Algeria, at Constantine, may have involved the crossing of 640 km of sea (del Hoyo *et al.* 2004).

A similar pattern of vertical displacement and winter wanderings holds fine for the eastern population of the Wallcreeper in the Indian Subcontinent where it breeds mostly above 3300 m (del Hoyo *et al.* 2004). In winter it commonly reaches the foothills in suitable country and sometimes wanders considerable distances, up to 500 km, in the plains, in the Indian

Subcontinent. It has occurred in, "plains of northern Pakistan in the northern Punjab from Mianwali to Kalabagh on the Indus east through the Salt Range to Faisalabad and Lahore, and in small numbers also to northern Baluchistan (Quetta) the plains of northern India south to Delhi, and to Uttar Pradesh at Fatehpur Sikri, Etawah and Ghazipur, also Rajasthan?" (Harrap & Quinn 1996). It has also been recorded from Meghalaya (Rasmussen & Anderton 2005), and Amritsar (del Hoyo *et al.* 2004). There is an old record from Lyallpur (Aitken 1910). The species has occurred irregularly in Delhi (Ganguli 1975) although there are no recent records.

It is not easy to explain the presence of the species in Gajner, an arid area in the Thar Desert. Nevertheless, the possibility of occasional drift¹ should not be excluded; bearing in mind that the Wallcreeper's mode of flight makes it extremely susceptible to this phenomenon.

Acknowledgement

I thank Harish Sharma, and Gajender, for sharing information about Wallcreeper sightings in Bharatpur.

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¹ Drift migration: "a migration forced by adverse climate conditions such as a storm, gale, or hurricane," [Eritzo *et al.* 2007. *The ornithologist's dictionary*. 290 pp. Lynx Edicions: Barcelona.

Purple-backed Starling *Sturnus sturninus* in the Andaman Islands, India, and its status in the Indian Subcontinent

Manoj Sharma & Harkirat Singh Sangha

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Purple-backed Starling *Sturnus sturninus* ['Daurian Starling' in Manakadan & Pittie (2000)] breeds from north-eastern Mongolia, southern Transbaikalia and the Amur Valley to north-central and north-eastern China, and North Korea (Dickinson 2003). It migrates through much of China (del Hoyo *et al.* 2009), wintering in southern China (Meyer de Schauensee 1984), Thailand (Robson 2004; Lekagul & Round 2005), Malaysia (Wells 2007), Singapore, Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam (Robson 2005), and Sumatra and Java (del Hoyo *et al.* 2009). There is a single specimen in the collection of the Bombay Natural History Society from Pegu, Myanmar (Abdulali 1979), an adult bird with a patch of violet blue on the nape (Oates 1882). Reid (1886) also records an adult male specimen in the collection of the erstwhile Provincial Museum, Lucknow, presented by E. W. Oates, and collected in Tenasserim.

The species is known to winter in southern Myanmar, in Tenasserim, where it is abundant around Tavoy in April (Smythies 1986). It is a straggler to Borneo (Smythies 1968), Hong Kong (King *et al.* 1975), and the Indian Subcontinent (Ali & Ripley 1986; Kotagama *et al.* 2006; Grimmett *et al.* 2011).

As there are only a handful of records in more than 100 years, it is considered a rare vagrant on mainland India. A male was collected out of a flock of 17 birds on 16 July 1902 at 3350 m on the head of Turikho valley in Chitral (Fulton 1904; Roberts 1992). Two or three birds were observed in Mudumalai Wildlife Sanctuary in southern India on 5 March 1995 (Robson 1996). A pair was recorded at Koshi Tapu Wildlife Reserve on 10 May 2002, followed by five males and a female on 11 May 2002 (Basnet & Chaudhary 2003; Rasmussen & Anderton 2005).

Its status in the Andaman and Nicobar archipelago is recorded as vagrant (del Hoyo *et al.* 2009). Its earliest records from the archipelago are given by Hume (1874), who collected one bird that flew into his boat between Little Andaman- and Nicobar Islands. Davison collected two specimens out of a flock of 70–80



Purple-backed Starling. Photo: H. S. Sangha

birds at Kamorta Island in the chain of Nicobar Islands (Hume 1874). Though Hume was not quite sure of their identification, the specimens recorded by him were all immature birds (Abdulali 1965). Feare & Craig (1998), based on Abdulali's remarks, also subscribe to the view that most birds visiting the archipelago are immatures. It is worth noting that both the records are not from the chain of islands comprising 'Andaman Islands.' Tikader (1984) is vague about its occurrence in the archipelago, stating it as an occasional winter visitor, without giving any locations. Tikader & Das (1985) give details of Hume's specimens and believe that the species may be an occasional winter visitor to these islands. This has led subsequent authors to record the species as a winter visitor to the archipelago. In common usage the archipelago is referred to compositely as 'Andaman & Nicobar Islands.' This has further misled subsequent authors to record the species as occasionally wintering in the Andaman Islands, whereas there are no previous confirmed record of its specific occurrence from there. However, Ali & Ripley (1986) indicate that it may be an occasional winter visitor to the Andaman Islands. Its status in the Nicobar Islands also needs clarity. Butler (1899) never came across the species, believing they could not be common there. Abdulali (1967) doubted whether the species regularly wintered in the Nicobars. Sankaran (1995) did not record it in Nicobar Islands.

An adult male Purple-backed Starling has glossy purple upperparts and nape, and two white wing-bars (Kazmierczak 2000). The female resembles the male (Tikader 1984) but is duller, with a grey-brown mantle, and duller wings (Grimmett *et al.* 1998). An immature bird is greyer, with a browner back, and lacks the nape patch (Feare & Craig 1998). Adult birds show white lores and a ring around the eye (Baker 1926). In winter they are known to occur in coastal vegetation, derelict land, farmlands, gardens, and parks (Medway & Wells 1976; Hails 1987).

We briefly saw a flock of four–five birds feeding on the fruits of a *Ficus* sp. at Beodnabad (11°35'07"N, 92°43'56"E), South

Fig. 1. Purple-backed Starling *Sturnus sturninus* in South Andaman Island on *Cocos nucifera*.



Photos: Manoj Sharma

Fig. 2. A restless murmuration of Purple-backed Starlings *Sturnus sturninus* in South Andaman Island preparing to roost on *Cocos nucifera*.



Andaman Island on 24 February 2011, at 1515 hrs. Another flock of 25–30 birds was briefly observed later that afternoon, near a waterbody, at 1610 hrs, flying around and perching on *Cocos nucifera* trees. The birds were quite restless and noisy. On 5 March 2011, at 1620 hrs we saw a flock of more than 200 birds near Sippighat (11°36'10"N, 92°44'22"E), South Andaman Island (Figs 1 & 2). The restless flock was frequently settling on top of *C. nucifera* trees, and then suddenly taking off in a tight mass. The flock was observed for more than 30 min and this behaviour of settling and suddenly flying away in panic continued throughout our observation. It was obvious that the birds were trying to settle down to roost for the night.

On 1 November 2011, at 1430 hrs a flock of 40–50 birds was seen flying into a *Ficus* sp at Beodnabad. On 29 December 2011 at 1515 pm a flock of c.100 birds were seen feeding on the fruits of a large *Ficus* sp at Beodnabad. The birds were in the company of a few Red-whiskered Bulbuls *Pycnonotus jocosus* and a female Asian Fairy Bluebird *Irena puella*, and were being disturbed by Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis*. On 16 January 2012 at 0715 hrs, about 40–45 birds were seen feeding on the fruit of a *Ficus* sp. at Port Mort, South Andaman Island. The birds were in the company of Vernal Hanging Parrot *Loriculus vernalis*, Asian Fairy Bluebird, Red-whiskered-, and Andaman Bulbul *P. fuscoflavescens*. Once again the birds were being disturbed by Common Myna. On 6 February 2012 at 0720 hrs, about 40–50 birds were seen feeding on the fruit of *Ficus* sp. at Sippighat. On 22 February 2012 at 1630 hrs, a flock of 50–60 birds was seen flying into a *Ficus* sp. at 'Dairy Farm' located within the city of Port Blair. Some birds were seen feeding on its fruit. The flock was restless and flew away after two–three minutes. On 2 March 2012 at 0615 hrs, a flock of seven–eight birds was seen perched on a dead branch of a *Ficus* sp. next to a beach at 'Kala Pathar' on Havelock Island, Ritchie's Archipelago, Andaman Islands. Other birds observed in the same tree were Vernal Hanging Parrot, Alexandrine Parakeet *Psittacula eupatria*, Long-tailed Parakeet *P. longicauda*, Green Imperial Pigeon *Ducula aenea*, Black-naped Oriole *Oriolus chinensis*, Asian Glossy Starling *Aplonis panayensis*, White-headed Starling *S. erythropygus*, and Olive-backed Sunbird *Nectarinia jugularis* (Vikram Shil pers. comm.).

Discussion

The sightings at Beodnabad on 24 February 2011 and at Sippighat on 5 March 2011 constitute the first confirmed record of the species from Andaman Islands. Interestingly, the number of birds recorded at Sippighat is probably the highest ever recorded from the Indian Subcontinent. It is probable that Purple-backed Starling winters in the Andaman Islands. In all likelihood it has been overlooked in the past. The accompanying pictures reveal the presence of adult birds, believing the earlier view that only immature birds occasionally occurred in the Andaman & Nicobar Islands.

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Post card from Belize, Central America

Coastal Caribbean Biology at the University of Arkansas—Fort Smith

Exploring Mayan ruins. Floating through dark limestone caves on a tyre tube. Snorkelling amongst sharks, rays, and sea turtles. Zip-lining at top speed through a rainforest canopy. Boating down a river flanked by tropical forests. These are snapshots of what my tropical biology students experienced in Belize. Although birding and other wildlife watching was our primary focus, these activities served to keep the participants engaged as they absorbed Belize's fabulous biodiversity. Clearly, for the novice, this was a great way to get exposed to the floral and faunal splendor of the tropics.

These were all part of *Coastal Caribbean Biology*, a new course I developed at the University of Arkansas—Fort Smith. In May 2011, I took 32 students on back-to-back trips to this little country in Central America. Formerly called British Honduras, this Manipur-sized (22,965 km²) nation, at the base of the Yucatan Peninsula, is one of the best destinations for English-speaking tourists, especially those seeking a taste of tropical biodiversity. Its year-round warm climate, political stability, thin population density, and a largely bilingual (English and Spanish) populace make it one of the best places to visit in this part of the world. With nearly 600 species of birds and over 40% of its land protected, it offers a bonanza for wildlife enthusiasts.

With habitats ranging from mangrove swamps, coastal lagoons and barrier reefs, to pine savannahs and evergreen forests, it is impossible to get an overview of the country's flora and fauna without staying in different places. We stayed in three spots. The first was the Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary, an inland lagoon in northern Belize, where we were treated to hordes of water birds, including the spectacular Jabiru Stork, Belize's national bird. The scrubland adjoining the lagoons offered glimpses of interesting wildlife, like spiny-tailed iguanas (a local delicacy which the natives call *Bamboo chicken*), Common Tody-, and Vermilion flycatchers. An added treat was the close encounters with the rare black howler monkeys in the nearby village of Bermudian Landing, where the locals have developed a Community Baboon Sanctuary (CBS). The CBS has become a model for grass roots conservation. Over 200 villagers from seven villages have pledged to protect and grow monkey-favored trees and stop slashing-and-burning. They have built and maintained monkey-crossing aerial bridges across forest gaps and roads to protect the monkeys from being mauled by village dogs. Students from my Wildlife Conservation class were particularly pleased to be there since CBS is featured in our textbook.

We spent four days based at the Crystal Paradise Resort in the village of Cristo Rey near the Guatemalan border. A local Belizean family prepared delicious regional and American food. Food was served in a large thatch-roofed dining hall in full view of an array of bird feeders that attracted charismatic birds like toucans, chachalacas, orioles, and hummingbirds. Both humans and birds enjoyed the daily feast of fresh tropical fruit. The resort is tucked away in a remote spot by the scenic Macal River, flanked by tropical forests. We canoed four miles of the Macal and saw colourful tropical specialties like Black-cowled Orioles, Bare-throated Tiger Herons, and Black-headed Trogons. Paddling by the limestone bluffs along the river, we flushed

proboscis bats from their daytime hideouts. At siesta times in the hot afternoons, we swam in the rock pools by the river and enjoyed Green Kingfishers and Mangrove Swallows fly around at top speed low over the waters. We made a day trip to the 1,000 year-old Xunantunich Mayan ruins, an experience that offered a perfect blend of archaeology and natural history. These ruins were covered by rainforests until their discovery in 1892.

Cave tubing at the Caves Branch River was a truly phenomenal experience. Sitting on tyre tubes with our posteriors arching into the cool waters (and occasionally scraping stony bottoms), we floated through inky-black limestone caves. LED lights strapped to our foreheads afforded some illumination. Now and then we drifted through cracks or cave openings that revealed glimpses of the blue sky or the emerald green forest canopy above. Ridgeway's Rough-winged Swallows darted in and out of the entrances carrying nest material. In the blue stagnant rock pools near the cave entrances, we enjoyed cool dips among milling schools of Mexican tetras eating prey flushed from beneath our feet. These beautiful fish have become a nuisance because they follow cave divers' lights far deeper into caves than they would normally venture, and prey on rare invertebrates. Sighting the deadly fer-de-lance, one of the world's most venomous snakes, coiled up in a limestone crevice by the river was a memorable experience.

I had always hesitated to include zip-lining in any of these activities. What can be derived from an ecologists' standpoint by streaking down a canopy, hanging precariously from a wire? As it turned out, the experience was not only exhilarating, but we actually learned some canopy biology. Not while zipping, of course, but during the long climbs up wooden stairways that spiraled the massive, buttressed, tropical trees. We also had to wait our turns on platforms erected 45 m or so up on these cathedral-like giants. The trees were festooned with epiphytes (plants that grow on other plants) like bromeliads. It was nice to see them from above, for a change. Notable bird sightings included a Streak-headed Wood Creeper battering a long caterpillar and struggling to gobble it down; Montzeuma Oropendolas hanging off their long pendulous nests uttering bubbly calls; and the rare Olive-backed Euphonia collecting nest material at eye-level. Until then we could only get fleeting glimpses of these euphonias by arching our necks backwards and scanning the canopy. This was a unique and welcome perspective.

One of the best sites we visited was the world famous Belize Zoo, which harbours only native animals of Belize. Situated amidst the tropical savannah, and rendered lush by scores of planted trees, the campus yielded wildlife sightings even as we enjoyed the captive animals and the quaint hand-painted educational signs. Wild chachalacas, caciques, and tityras visited the enclosures, partaking in the largesse of food laid out for zoo animals. I showed my students the cottage I lived for four months in the late 1980s (as part of my graduate program) in the savanna forests adjacent to the zoo: now a part of their Tropical Education Centre.

Belize boasts the second largest barrier reef in the world. We spent the last three days on the delightful island

of Caye Caulker. From here we had quick access by boat to the Hol Chan Marine Reserve, where we snorkelled in waters teeming with nurse sharks, sting rays, and green sea turtles. The wildlife here has been unmolested for decades and is fearless of humans, swimming around apparently oblivious to our presence. We could reach out and touch the sharks. Our guides even scooped up the sting rays in their arms so we can touch and take photographs. We had to frequently side step to avoid the rays swimming by like flying saucers or the sea turtles languidly swimming around in apparent slow motion. We floated atop spectacular coral gardens, and stayed a respectful distance from venomous creatures like fire corals and lion fish. We identified over 25 species of reef fish, including exquisitely beautiful rock beauties and butterfly fish. An unexpected bonus was the marine mammal, the West Indian manatee, a pair of which grazed the bottom of a sandy expanse near the coral reefs. Later, on the island, we hiked to mangrove swamps and saw birds that were typical of this habitat, including Mangrove Warblers, Rufous-necked Wood Rails, Yucatan Vireos, and Black Catbirds. The skies were dotted with Magnificent Frigatebirds soaring like giant black crosses. A variety of shorebirds and terns

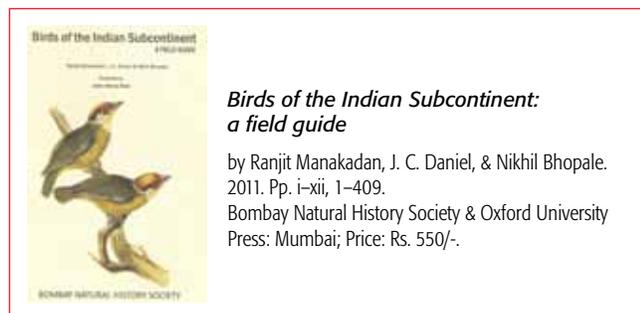
pushed our Belize bird list beyond 125!

The Belize experience was a great follow-up to my Ecology course that most of the participants had prior to the trip. Many ecology lectures were repeated briefly in the field, reinforcing concepts learned. We discussed dispersal of the guanacaste tree's massive seeds while squatting right under its gigantic crown, with the odd-looking circular seed pods in our hands; we delicately picked through the foliar nectaries and beltian bodies of ant-acacias and marveled about this classic case of mutualism between the acacia tree and ants; we reflected on the bizarre sex-changing life history of the blue-headed wrasse, a coral reef fish, even as it swam around our ankles. The entire course was an extension of our far-away classroom in land-locked Arkansas. It was just the right way to learn tropical biology.

Belize is one of the few places on earth largely unspoiled by human development. Given its strong conservation ethic and low population pressure, the outlook is refreshingly good for its wildlife. Being just a two-hour flight from the United States, it depends on ecotourism from America to sustain its people and its natural wonders. I am glad I was able to contribute my mite in this regard.

—Ragupathy Kannan

Reviews



The volume under review was originally published in 1983, to commemorate the centenary of the venerable Bombay Natural History Society, and created a sensation, for it answered the prayers of every Indian birder. At last, here was a single volume that illustrated all the species, with entire families on a plate, and closely resembling species so readily comparable to each other. Initially only its size was daunting. Later reviewers shot it full of holes (Rands 1985; Redman 1985; 'W. E. S.' 1985; Biswas 1986; Roberts *et al.* 1986). Even at that time there were ghost whispers in the corridors of India's oldest NGO, that it had been hurriedly cobbled together, to meet the centennial deadline. Subsequently, a '2nd impression' was issued in 1989, two years after the demise of Sálím Ali, with some monochrome plates converted to coloured ones, and purportedly rectifying past errors pointed out by the various reviewers (see above).

That was over twenty years ago. The field-guides' boat was rocked again after ten years, with the publication of the spectacular *Pocket guide* (Grimmett *et al.* 1999), followed a year later by the much-loved *Birds of India* (Kazmierczak 2000). By then the *Pictorial guide* was passé.

Ever since, Indian birders graduating from Ali's classic *Book of Indian birds*, or Martin Woodcock's delectable little *Collins handguide to the birds of the Indian Subcontinent* (1980)

invariably bought and followed one of the new extant field-guides—so much so that even the English names of birds used in manuscripts submitted for publication, long followed from Ali & Ripley's various works, began to change as birders knew only those from the newer guides. The BNHS itself began to allow these 'new' English names to seep into the pages of its journal, vis-à-vis those from the Ali & Ripley era. In the process, a part of India's cultural and linguistic heritage, from the British and post-independence era, was allowed to fade away. But for the decade that it held sway, nothing replaced the *Pictorial guide* in terms of convenience.

Like many fellow-birders of the *Pictorial guide's* heydays, I too crammed my copy with marginalia. Colour coding my jottings—red ink for additional ID information, and blue for highlighting errors. Many of its illustrations took on the strange silhouettes of avian cacti after I 'Petersoned' them. We enjoyed many idyllic times together. Then, of course, I bought the 'second edition,' and used it till more ergonomically designed field guides appeared at the turn of the millennium (actually 1999). (The larger Grimmett *et al.* work of 1998 does not count here.) But I rued my handwritten notes in that *Pictorial guide's* first edition.

The new wave of field-guides, Grimmett *et al.* (1999), Kazmierczak (2000), and much later, Rasmussen & Anderton (2005), took the format to a different level. They were a fresh wind that blew across a landmass dripping with the mundane monsoon humidity, crisping the birding fraternity upright with their myriad attractions. The first had delightful illustrations, layout, and notes. The second created a stir with its uncannily accurate distribution maps. The third broke new ground in revising taxonomy, introducing sonograms, and generally bringing the most advanced form of a field-guide to the Indian Subcontinent. It however tweaked the competition by splitting the work into two volumes: a field-guide, and, a sort of synoptic handbook.

To resurrect the *Pictorial guide* in the face of such stiff competition is either an act of bravado, grittiness—J. C. Daniel's,

as acknowledged by Manakadan (p. ix), or confidence in its marketability, perhaps through the good offices of the BNHS, and the widespread fame of its erstwhile authors.

So what has changed that makes the *Pictorial guide* worthy of a resurrection? What works for it?

- The size of the book has been reduced to a more acceptable and manageable one.
- The indices have been rationalised, now cross-referenced to page numbers that contain the actual text on a taxon, rather than the roundabout route required in the earlier formats wherein the index directed one to the checklists in the family accounts section, which then pointed to the relevant plate.
- The price is a major plus point, as it sells up to Rs 300/- less than its closest rival in the pricing war—the 2nd ed., of Grimmett *et al.* (2011).
- The text has been hugely strengthened with crisp inputs on identification features, which was a major lacuna in the earlier editions.
- The illustrations too, apparently, have been ‘improved,’ using modern software, to ‘make-up,’ or ‘air-brush’ the scans of the original plates. This was a massive exercise in the number of corrections made.

“The earlier publication had 95 colour plates ... The current edition ... uses these plates with additional drawings of raptors in flight, besides a few other species or races. Other changes in the plates include placement of flight diagrams next to illustrations of species and changes in the background and layout of illustrations,” (p. 1). The guide now has 112 plates, illustrating 1,251 species. Another 100-odd species/races are discussed but not illustrated.

While only widespread usage of the book in the field, and at the desk, will throw up points that need to be addressed before another edition is published, I have jotted a few that struck me during a rapid assessment.

- The wonderful supplementary illustrations inserted on blank pages showcase period art to contemporary bird-watchers. I wish they were all properly captioned in detail, with names of artists, and the source publication, instead of the unhelpful legend on the verso of the half-title page.
- Though this is not the first book to illustrate the Bugun Liocichla *Liocichla bugunorum*, that special privilege having been wrested by the monumental *Handbook of the birds of the world* (del Hoyo *et al.* 2007), it is the first to do so among the Indian Subcontinent’s eclectic ornithological library, and has rightly placed an illustration on the title page. But the same illustration should have also been used on p. 275, as the original pl. 83 could not be changed to accommodate it.
- The plate on p. 149 has been ‘flipped,’ perhaps for better composition, but the signature has flipped with it!
- A few typos that need correction: on p. xii, *Branta sandvicensis* is the correct spelling, and the 2nd edition of Ripley’s *Synopsis* was published in 1982.
- Marshall’s Iora *Aegithina nigrolutea* (pl. 71, pp. 229–230) has been reported from Karnataka and Sri Lanka in the past couple of years, which is not mentioned here.
- The two separate species of the oriole, *Oriolus kundoo*, and *O. oriolus* are not identified in the text (p. 375) by the numbering, “1a” and “1b,” that separates them on pl. 109.
- *Parus xanthogenys* is distinguished from *P. aponotus* by its “yellow wing bars,” (p. 326), but the bird illustrated as

number 10 on pl. 96, has the white wing bars of the latter.

- There are no distribution maps. These have become *de rigueur* in modern field-guides. I strongly feel that this is the one area that the authors need to concentrate upon.
- The plates are at best of a vintage quality and do not serve the quality expectations of modern birders. Quality, in terms of detailing, and above all, in the jizz of each species. Not simply in their static postures, but also in those depicting action, as in flight. A lot more happens on the canvas of today’s field-guides’ plates, than the mere two-dimensional depiction of perched birds: habitats included, behaviour illustrated, confusing taxa juxtaposed, *etc.* Such changes would entail substantial financial outlays, besides harnessing the requisite talent to make them a reality.

I do not hesitate to make some suggestions for what, to my mind, should be the way forward:

- The front end-papers could be used for plate key illustrations, as has already been done in a couple of earlier works (Kazmierczak 2000; Rasmussen & Anderton 2005). It is one of the easiest of ways to direct a user to the plate likely to illustrate the bird being searched.
- The plate index (pp. 386–387) should be moved to the rear end-papers for ease and speed of access. Turning pages in the field, invariably single-handedly, is a chore.
- The lack of a biography of John Henry Dick (1919–1995) is a major oversight. To me, *his illustrations* were *the* singular contribution to the book.
- Anatidae in flight have been placed alongside resting birds, which is a good thing. Care is required to make visible the trailing white edges to primaries for numbers 1, 2, 3, *etc.*, on pl. 11.
- The inclusion of distribution maps might be asking for the moon, but if this work has to create a significant mark in South Asian ornithology, it can only do so through the inclusion of accurate, rigorously researched maps. I say this because the authors, and the organisation they represent, the BNHS, are in the happy position of being ‘in situ,’ amidst the action, unlike their competition, which is frankly, ‘ex situ,’ far removed. But for this, a strong team is required to sniff out past records, assess their credibility, establish their taxonomic/specific authenticity, and pinpoint their digital location in the modern geopolitical context. That is half the work. The other, to follow contemporary reports across an ever-widening media spectrum, weighing them, matching them with previous distributions, pouncing upon the odd, the vagrant, the suspect, and the wind-blow.

To take this to its zenith would be the creation of an interactive website recording the distribution of India’s birds—in real time, wherein every new record from a hitherto unrecorded location, can be threshed, winnowed, and uploaded—a task for Indian Bird Conservation Network?

This is a brave and immensely creditable attempt at reviving the erstwhile *Pictorial guide*, with major fresh inputs of text in the department of species IDs, an input that is invisible to new users, but apparent to, and gratefully acknowledged by, those who cut their teeth on its comprehensive illustrations.

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– Aasheesh Pittie



Thomas Hardwicke was a lad of nineteen, when in 1778 he disembarked at the Princep Jetty, Calcutta, as an Artillery cadet in the Bengal Presidency Army. Like the average British school boy, Hardwicke may well have indulged in the hobby of collecting bird's nests and eggs but nothing could have prepared him for the impact that the rich chorus of bird-song and the gorgeously plumaged birds make on the first "arrivals" to Indian shores. That cadet Hardwicke was certainly smitten by Indian birds for life becomes abundantly clear from the fact that the first ever book, devoted exclusively to India's natural history, stands attributed to him. The *Illustrations Of Indian Zoology: chiefly from the collection of Major General Thomas Hardwicke*, published by the British Museum of Natural History, in 1830–1834 in two volumes, was a tribute to the abiding empathy that soldiers develop for flora and fauna around them. Now almost two hundred years later, the 19 Infantry Division stationed in the Srinagar Valley since 1947 (commanded by the likes of the Late General Thimmaya, D S O), has published a large format pictorial guide show-casing the symbiotic relationship between soldiers and the birds in their vicinity.

Fortunately for Indian natural science, Hardwicke's legacy became a passion with six other Indian Army officers who followed in his wake, and in particular with Major T. C. Jerdon, a surgeon in the Madras Presidency Army. Jerdon's *Birds of India* (2 vols., 3 parts) published in 1862–1864 covered 1008 species, and remains an incredible achievement, earning him the sobriquet, 'Father of Indian Ornithology!' In the manner of Hardwicke, Jerdon also employed the most accomplished artists from Bengal for illustrating his collection, in watercolour, with fetching results. One Jerdon folio of 50 Indian Birds is rendered in such exquisite colours and minute detail that it is simply beyond monetary reach today!

Some 70 years later, when compact cameras suited for outdoors photography became available, Lieut Colonel RSP Bates of the 1st Royal Jat Regiment would use one extensively and with good effect, resulting in his book, *Bird-Life in India* (1931), the first of its kind! Bates next shifted his focus from the plains to the

Kashmir Valley and the fruit of his efforts was the excellent book, *Breeding Birds of Kashmir* (1952), covering 211 species, as also a few breath-taking landscapes. Both books are all times classics, and most deservedly, Bates emerged as the 'Father of Indian Bird Photography!'

Through a providential coincidence, another 70 years would elapse before Lieut Colonel Rohit Gupta, a Corps of Engineers Officer, would arrive in the *avatar* of Bates. However, unlike Bates who spent 12 months of leave spread over six years in the Valley, in pursuit of his objective, Rohit mostly chanced upon birds randomly, as he soldiered through 2010 into 2011. For instance, I received a compact disc once, with five images of the Himalayan Woodpecker, two of which are spread on pages 54 and 55 of the book under review. I was amused when over the telephone he told me with a chuckle, "I was talking to my Commanding Officer, when I heard the "tap-tap-tap" sound from the tree above us. I excused myself, looked up, and got these photographs!" My compliments to his Commanding Officer for indulging Rohit's passion. Be that as it may, both enthusiasts exhibited ample sensitive understanding of bird behavior and extraordinary skills to freeze the image where the bird's personality appears at its best. Where Rohit may be faulted is for including in the book, the images of the fledglings of the Yellow-billed Blue Magpie and of the Blue Whistling Thrush, which were yet to acquire their full adulthood plumage. I find no other blemish.

The book follows the accepted format, used by the leading practitioners of this discipline the world over in recent times; a glossary of terms used and a concise descriptive text of each species. But unlike the contemporary publications, this book carries the visuals of the male as well as the female where their plumage differs from each other distinctly. Yet another interesting feature is the historical peep into the days of wildlife abundance in the Valley, a brief on the five wildlife sanctuaries in the region, and a chapter on the gradual shift from trophy hunting to wildlife conservation, and from the sporting-gun, to the camera.

The bibliography shows how well the text was researched which will surely merit the book's inclusion among the current ornithological literature. And Lieut Colonel Rohit Gupta emerges as an outstanding, amateur Naturalist whose sensitivities reach out to the birds he encounters. This quality is implicit in including Muriel Brown's poem "Birdlife In Kashmir", 1921 and indeed in concluding the book with Robert Lynd's profound observation:

"There is nothing in which the birds differ from man than the way in which they can build and yet leave a landscape as it was before".

–Lieut General (Retd) Baljit Singh



Birds of southern coastal Karnataka

by Dr K. Prabhakar Achar & Shivashankar
Paperback, xvi+240 pp., 224 photos,
bilingual (English & Kannada)
Published by Bhuvanendra Nature Club, India.
Price: Rs: 400/-

Contents: Dedication (p. iii), Foreword by Prof (Dr.) Arunachalam Kumar (pp. iv–v), Preface (pp: viii–x), Introduction (pp. 1–4), Birdlife (pp. 5–14), Birdwatching (pp. 15–21), Bird migration (pp. 22–27), Breeding and nesting in birds (pp. 28–33), Synopsis of birds of southern coastal Karnataka (pp. 61–80), Plates (pp. 82–192), Checklist of birds of southern Coastal Karnataka (pp. 192–213), Bibliography (pp. 214), About the authors (pp. 215–217), Index of species (pp. 218–233), Format for recording field observations of birds (pp. 234), Format for recording birds identified by the birdwatchers (pp. 236–238).

In an age where popular field guides written by ornithologists from outside its borders have swamped the birdwatching scene in India, this new bilingual regional field guide, '*Birds of southern coastal Karnataka*' by Dr K. Prabhakar Achar and Shivashankar comes as a welcome addition to the local birdwatching literature. It is a worthy successor to the '*Field guide to the birds of Dakshina Kannada*,' which was co-authored by the first author and K. Geetha Nayak, and published in 2000. This is a compact, light, and colourful publication with photographs of 224 species and a checklist of 389, along with several general notes on birds, bird-watching, and habitats. Authorship of the book is a nice blend of science and aesthetics—a biologist-academician joining hands with a young, dedicated bird photographer to produce a work of commendable value.

The main portion of the book is the description of 224 species of birds found in the region with their colour photographs. Layout is consistent, four species on the right side are described in both languages and they are illustrated by colour photographs on the left side—gives a good sense of a field guide. Description is crisp, carries general appearance of male and female birds, provides brief words on habitat and a feeling of abundance in the region, and includes nesting season, sometimes details of nest and eggs. For migratory birds, the wintering season is provided. Utility value of such a single page layout is immense for a beginner; it provides the information in a consistent manner without the need to scamper across pages for description and illustration. All the photographs are by the second author, a resident of the region, and hence automatically serve as documentation. The choice of 224 species is not clear – but all of them definitely occur in the region consistently, and not as vagrants. Of course, this begs the question why other seemingly common species like Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*, Greater Flameback *Chrysocolaptes lucides*, Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*, Jungle Owlet *Glaucidium radiatum*, and Purple Sunbird *Cinnyris asiaticus* were not included; probably they are indeed rare in the region or there were some restrictions on page layout. Although the Kannada text is a word-to-word translation of the English part of the book, the drafting of the text in Kannada is quite lucid, to

the point, and has a good readability.

The cover page is attractive – a picture of a male Malabar Trogon *Harpactus fasciatus*, almost at eye-level from a side angle – clearly one of the best pictures in the book. The back of the front cover provides a good map of the region under focus, indicating the borders and names of eight taluks, two districts (Udupi and Dakshin Kannada), all rivers, forest regions of Western Ghats, and three wildlife sanctuaries. The entire 8,441 km² strip of land is expected to hold up to 425 species of birds – which is an amazing diversity. The map is followed by a dedication to Sálím Ali and his protégé S. A. Hussain. A few lines on the latter, under dedication, would have been appropriate and would have set the tone for furthering ornithology in the region. Otherwise, birders, other than those who knew him, would not know much about him or of his attachment to the region or his contribution. Prof. (Dr) Arunachalam Kumar introduces the book, the authors and the region in a concise foreword giving an idea of what is to follow. This is followed by a three page foreword by the authors – the most important point here is the choice of taxonomy followed in this book, which is based on Manakadan & Pittie (2002). Though the classification is old by a decade, authors have taken care to, at least, include the more widespread 'common names' used in popular field guides from the Indian region – enabling the young readers to transit smoothly from this book to such books available in the market. Having said that, there are formatting errors in certain places, where the compound names have been split (e.g., Laughing thrushes, Leaf birds, Tree pies, etc.) and also, there are problems with hyphenation in common names of birds, both with respect to its use and the lack of it. Although it is indicated that some of the Kannada names are literal translations of the English names, a run through the checklist indicates that a great majority of them are taken from the "Revised checklist of the birds of Karnataka," by S. V. Narasimhan and Harish R. Bhat (<http://arjunhaarith.blogspot.in/2011/03/birds-of-karnataka-kannada-names.html>). Thus, the literal translations may add to the confusion with those local names that others (Harish R. Bhat and Pramod Subbarao. 2006. *Pakshi Prapancha*. Asima Prathishthana (Bangalore); Narasimhan, S.V. 2008. *Feathered Jewels of Coorg*. Coorg Wildlife Society. Madikeri) have already used.

The introductory section briefly talks about coastal Karnataka and habitats (the back endpapers have pictures of the habitats) and is followed by a section on 'Ornithology in India.' This section was probably written ten years ago with this line added as an afterthought, 'Internet based discussion groups also provide information on the local avifauna!' The line which describes '*Newsletter for Birdwatchers*' as the only national media dedicated to bird issues confirms this, as '*Indian BIRDS*,' started in the last decade does not find a mention. Last decade has been the age of e-groups and this decade shall be the age of social networking. These are now the singular sources of enormous ornithological information and conglomeration of Indian bird-watchers and ornithologists. The way it is currently mentioned, it seems to downplay the role played by e-media in Indian ornithology.

Besides providing details on the history of Ornithology of India, the ornithological/bird-watching history in the region should also have been given a fair treatment, given that the region has been of ornithological interest for nearly two centuries and references to birds of the region date back to 1840.

There is a small section on avifauna of southern coastal Karnataka which follows the history. This section also seems to be an afterthought and not carefully reviewed. How do Purple,

and Common Moorhens, and similar rails, and jacanas become flagship endemic species of this region? After this short burst of bird names, there is a ramble on how the habitat has got transformed from 1950s to now and practically nothing about the avifauna itself. This section could have been written much more interestingly by linking bird communities of the region to its habitats. A section on important bird-watching areas in the region and the habitats that they support would have been helpful to beginners and to birders outside the region.

The next twenty odd pages introduce the reader to birds, bird-watching, bird-photography, migration, and breeding. These pages are essential for a beginner before he starts using this book as a field guide. These pages are easy to read minus any technical jargons and hope this will hold the interest of a new reader. Like the authors provided sketches of different beak and leg structure, the feathers could also have been demystified with a few sketches. Nearly half of the pages on bird-watching focuses on bird photography – hope this over-emphasis does not prevent the beginner from jumping the gun by ignoring the basic observation with pen/pencil note-making and starting directly with lenses.

It is perhaps the case that some of these pages were taken directly from its predecessor publication – but authors should have validated some of the statements in the recent context – Siberian Cranes *Grus leucogeranus* have not visited Bharaputra for about a decade now and repeated mention of that to explain migration could have been avoided. Satellite tracking had several recent successes rather than the historical ones mentioned in the book with Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*, Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*, Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*, Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea*, and Bar-headed Goose *Anser indicus* by BNHS; all of them could be tracked by the entire world through the Internet. The colour-banding of Bar-headed Geese, which have been visiting southern India since three years, is also another advance in migration studies in the context of avian-influenza which was also worth mentioning. Also, the word 'migration' has been used improperly and even the local (daily) movements of birds have been termed as migration.

This being more of a chapter intended for popular reading, it is understandable that Latin names should be used minimally; however lack of consistent common names like 'Wilson's Petrel' or 'Black poll Warbler' is bound to confuse a reader who comes across these species elsewhere.

Under the section "Usefulness of Birds", the sub-section, "As food for Man" should have been avoided, for obvious reasons.

Next twenty pages provide a synopsis of the birds of southern Karnataka providing notes of the families and indicating classification. As mentioned earlier, this is based on Manakadan & Pittie (2002) but wherever appropriate the alternate common names have been provided. I wonder if that was an afterthought as the alternate names are replete with mistakes – 'Dubchick', 'Gargany', 'Black Buza,' etc. But the decision of the authors to do the same is laudable – classification order itself does not confuse anybody but the use of common names does to a great extent. However, this synopsis only covers the 224 species of birds included in the main section of this book. This could have been combined along with the checklist provided at the back to save about 20 pp. Along with the synopsis, the page number where the species is described could also have been provided – improving indexing for a person browsing the synopsis.

The main section of species accounts starts with the illustration of parts of a bird using a colour photograph of a

leafbird *Chloropsis* sp. This is an excellent choice and body parts are marked comprehensively. An image of a bird in flight (perhaps the Oriental Honey Buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus*), illustrating its feathers would have added additional value.

It is beyond argument that pp. 82–192, which carry photographs and descriptions of 224 bird species are of great value for a bird-watcher of this region. Some of the plates are brilliant; particularly the plate with male sunbirds. Four species of swifts, including the rarely photographed Brown-backed Needletail *Hirundapus giganteus*, are shown. Photographs of Slaty-breasted Rail *Rallus striatus*, Banded Bay Cuckoo *Cacomantis sonneratti*, Greater Painted-Snipe *Rostratula benghalensis*, and Grey-headed Bulbul *Pycnonotus priocephalus* would make any bird-photographer envious. There are a few "wow" photographs including those of Malabar Trogon, Blue-headed Rock-thrush *Monticola cinclorhynchus*, and Malabar Whistling-thrush *Myophonus horsfieldii*. However, the reproduction of the photographs could have been better. The present quality of printing gives a slightly washed-down effect to most of the photographs.

Any field guide is also a gold-mine for identification problems – but the authors have admirably handled it and we could not spot any cases of misidentification. Other errors do occur in the book, but they are very few, e.g., the White Stork has been listed under Ibises and Spoonbills (Threskiornithidae); it has been indicated that prinias and warblers place their nests on the ground. In a few cases, where annotations of different species are given (pp. 82–193), a specific species has been compared or discussed in reference to another which is not covered (e.g., Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea* compared with Dunlin *C. alpina*, and Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* with Marsh Sandpiper *T. stagnatilis*).

Photographs are not captioned with the sex / age / morph / race of the bird illustrated and very often illustrate a comparatively rarer morph or race of a species e.g., Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*, Chestnut-tailed Starling *Sturnia malabarica*. Hence, beginners should be careful in jumping to conclusions using the photos as there is more to bird plumage than what is depicted. Hence, it is important that they have access to an auxiliary field guide where these are illustrated. Authors should attempt to indicate the plumage along with photo caption so that reader knows exactly what is depicted.

This book aspires to be a field guide - more on the lines of 'The book of Indian birds' and thus does not provide local information and proper status of birds in the region, failing to give a local flavour to the compilation. The 'status' of birds is given for the whole country and not for southern coastal Karnataka. The authors could have used their own observations or consulted other birdwatchers in the region or the state before settling the residency status of each species thus making the work more accurate. While drafting annotations, whatever the little that has been published on the birds of the region in over 140 publications has not been reviewed, including the earliest published information on the birds of the region by T. C. Jerdon in 1840. Also, the observations made by other birders who have operated in the region in the recent decades, namely Acharya Dwarakanath, Dr Arunachalam Kumar, Gopalakrishna Bhatta, K. S. Harshavardhana Bhat, S. A. Hussain, , N. A. Madyastha, , Ranjit Daniels, Stig Toft Madsen, to name a few, should have been detailed.

Comparisons of size with common species should be also treated as indicative: Brown Hawk-Owl *Ninox scutulata*,

Wood Sandpiper *T. glareola* and Blue-tailed Bee-eater *Merops philippinus* cannot be termed as Pigeon+, these are probably based on museum measurements from beak tip to tail tip which appeared in auxiliary literature but are extremely confusing for a bird-watcher in the field. Authors miss a helpful \pm notation (denoting 'roughly the same size') used in other books. Comparisons with quail and vulture are a little superfluous; an average birder does not encounter these species often. Perhaps myna and peafowl would have been more ideal. The hornbills (Malabar Grey *Ocyeros griseus* and Malabar Pied *Anthracoseros coronatus*) are both Kite+ though there is a large difference between the sizes of the two.

It is common practice now to include a checklist of birds along with any field guide. I think most books falter here and probably this one also. Birds like Rufous-bellied Plaintive Cuckoo *C. merulinus*, Crested Lark *Galerida cristata* and Silver-backed Needletail *H. cochinchinensis* are extralimital while others like Black-breasted Weaver *Ploceus benghalensis* and Rock Bush-

Quail *Perdicula argoondah* are unlikely to occur within this region. Treatment of some birds like Eurasian Scops Owl *Otus scops* and Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor* are based on old taxonomy and now refer directly to extralimital species.

Bibliographic listing in annexure is not technically sound and no standard format has been followed. And lastly, rather than a computer generated format for field observations a photograph of a hand-written field diary would have been more ideal. This is how most recordings in the field are made and not in an Excel sheet format. Last three pages for format for recording birds should be given a skip.

In summary, by producing this book – authors have added yet another cap to Indian ornithology, by covering one more region with a photo field guide that shall hopefully trigger more people to take up this hobby.

– Praveen J. & S. Subramanya

Letter to the Editor

Parasharya *et al.* (2010) reported variations in the plumages of Black-winged Stilts *Himantopus himantopus*. I would like to report the sighting of a Black-winged Stilt with a black crown, nape, and hind neck (See photo). In the afternoon of 1 April 2012 I had gone birding with a few friends—Dheeraj, Shafaat Ulla, and Aasheesh Pittie—to the Ameenpur tank (17°31'22"N, 78°19'22"E) near the BHEL township in Hyderabad. Dheeraj had informed us that an adjacent pond held reed-beds where large numbers of wagtails, weavers, and munias roosted. Before proceeding to this roost site we stopped to watch birds on Ameenpur tank where, amidst a flock of about twenty stilts, we spotted the odd one. Except for the different plumage, we did not see any behaviour that set it apart from the other stilts.

Reference

Parasharya, D., Patel, B., & Parasharya, B. M., 2010. Plumage variations in Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*. *Indian BIRDS* 6 (4&5): 98–99.

– Humayun Taher

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Photo: Humayun Taher

Black-winged Stilt with black crown, nape, and hind neck.

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WWF-India's AP State Office have been observing environmentally significant events like World Wetland Day, Environment Day, Earth Day, Wildlife Week, etc., to impart environmental education into the student community. As a part of this initiative, we have also been conducting nature camps for various school students on the World Wetland Day every year. With an apt theme of wetlands and tourism, the World Wetland's Day was



organised at Coringa Wildlife Sanctuary, Kakinada, and Kolleru Wildlife Sanctuary, Eluru by WWF. The event was sponsored by the Andhra Pradesh Tourism Corporation, A P State Forest Department, and NYROS technologies. About 120 students from government schools of Kakinada and 150 villagers from 10 villages located around Coringa WLS participated in the celebration. About 180 students along with 30 teachers from private schools of Eluru participated in the celebration at Kolleru WLS. Prominent citizens like A. K. Sinha IFS, CF, Wildlife Management Division, Eluru division; Mallikarjunaiah, DFO, Wildlife Management Division, Rajahmundry; K Thulasi Rao, State Project Coordinator, GOI-UNDP-GEF project; Pavan Mangampalli, CEO, NYROS Technologies, and D Laxmi Narasimha Raju, Sarpanch, Coringa, along with WWF team spoke



to the students and villagers on the importance of protecting the Coringa Wildlife Sanctuary. Rathnakumar, the FRO and P. Gracious, Retd., ACF of Eluru Forest Division presided over the celebration at Kolleru. The programme was extensively covered by the print and electronic media like Tv9, Eenadu TV and newspaper, Sakshi TV and newspaper, Andhra Jyoti, Andhra Bhoomi, Vartha, The Hindu, and Deccan Chronicle.



A new invertebrate species from Andhra Pradesh:

A new species of scorpion belonging to the genus *Heterometrus* Ehrenberg, 1828 has been described from the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh. *Heterometrus telanganaensis* sp. nov., differs from all Indian species of the genus in being one of the smallest species with a relatively short metasoma [the posterior part of an arachnid's abdomen (opisthosoma) that never carries appendages]. **Taxonomic Details:** *Heterometrus telanganaensis* Javed et al., 2011. **Type Locality:** India, Andhra Pradesh, Warangal District, Regonda (18°14'N, 79°49'E). **Etymology:** Named after the region, Telangana, where the specimens collection site, Regonda, is situated.



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