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Ladakh expeditions
Odisha records
Asian Stubtail



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PHOTOGRAPHER: Dileep Anthikad / Clement Francis.

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PHOTOGRAPHER: Clare Sulston.

The Southampton University Ladakh Expeditions 1976–1982: Full details of nine species previously unrecorded in India and four second records

Simon Delany, David Garbutt, Charles Williams, Clare Sulston, John Norton & Clive Denby

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Introduction

Graduate students from Southampton University in England participated in four late twentieth century ornithological expeditions to Ladakh in the north-western Himalaya of Jammu & Kashmir state, India (Table 1).

The expeditions were organised soon after the area opened up to visitors following over 30 years of war and civil unrest. The avifauna of Ladakh was not unknown at the time, following the nineteenth century Yarkand Mission (Sharpe 1891) and collecting expeditions by B. B. Osmaston (Osmaston 1925,

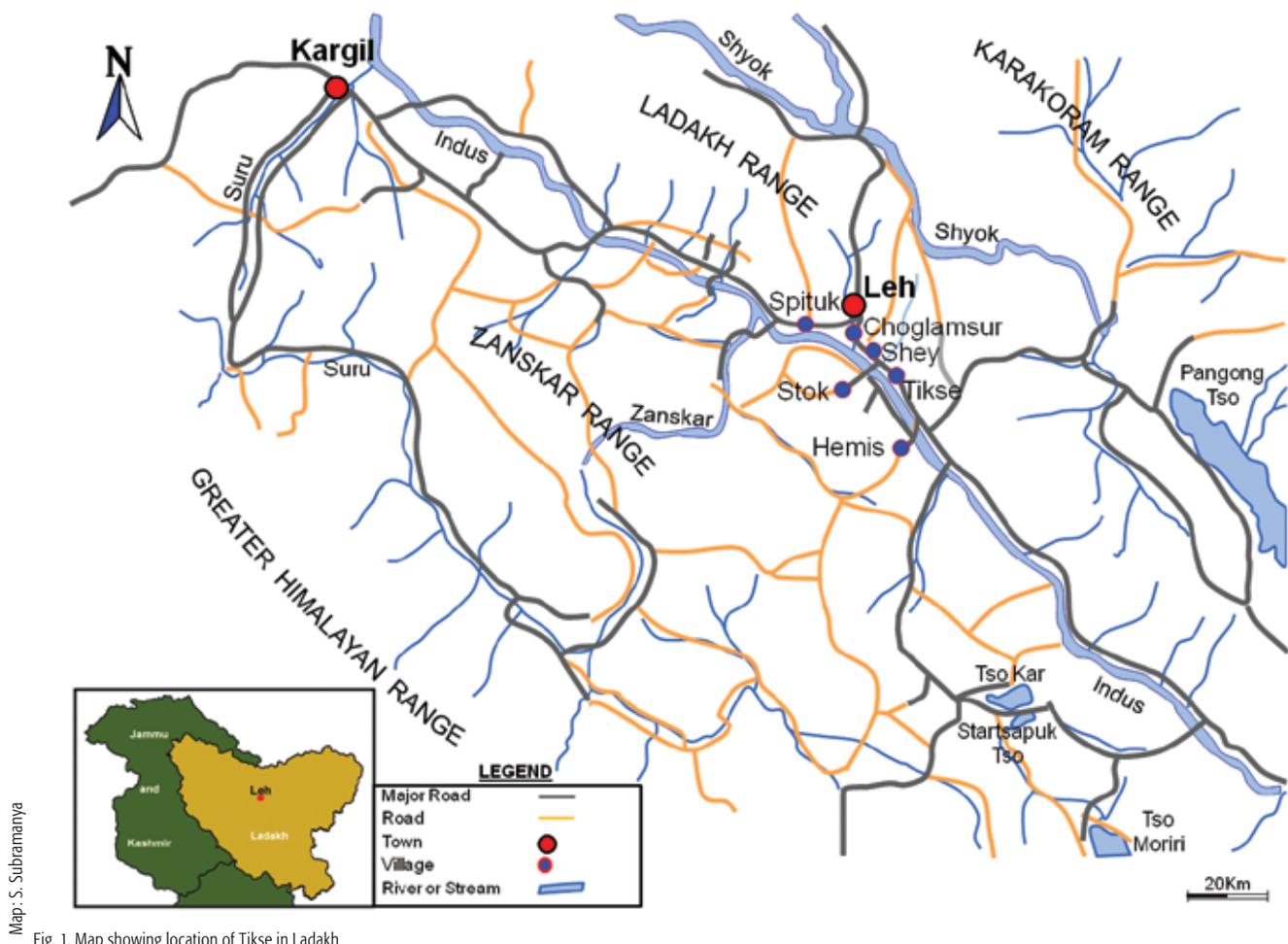


Table 1. Details of dates, personnel and publications relating to the four Southampton University Ladakh expeditions			
Start date	End date	Participant ornithologists	References
July 1976	September 1976	Denby, Phillips	Denby & Phillips. 1977
July 1977	October 1977	Delany, Williams	Williams & Delany 1979
July 1980	December 1980	Delany, Denby, Norton	Delany et al. 1982
July 1981	July 1982	Delany, Denby, Elliott, Garbutt, Sulston, Williams	Williams & Delany 1983

1926, 1927, 1930), Walter Koelz (Koelz 1937, 1939, 1940), and R. Meinertzhagen (Meinertzhagen 1927). These early studies all took place in the summer months and the Southampton University expeditions were interested in extending the knowledge of birds in Ladakh using modern methods of observation and trapping, and especially in studying the nature and scale of bird migration through and within the Himalaya.

The first three expeditions included the summer breeding season of most bird species and remained in Ladakh for the autumn migration period. The final expedition lasted an entire year and collected data in all seasons. By intensively observing and trapping migrants in a systematic way, the expeditions aimed to increase knowledge of the nature of bird migration within and across the Himalaya. The expeditions also aimed to contribute to the understanding of the extent to which massive mountain ranges act as barriers to migration, by recording the variety and numbers of long-distance migrants. They also aimed to record the nature and scale of altitudinal migration within Ladakh in a detailed and systematic way.

The ornithological findings of the expeditions were summarised in two papers (Williams & Delany 1985, 1986) and were included briefly in the monograph of birds for the region (Pfister 2004). The findings were not, however, fully included in the most recent monograph on the birds of South Asia (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). The present paper provides full details of the four species observed by the expeditions that had not at the time been recorded on the Indian Subcontinent, and the five additional species previously unrecorded in India. Details of four species with only one previous record in India have also been included.

The ornithological sections of the reports and other material related to the expeditions have also been made available online at: birds.garbuttconsult.ch/ladakh

Study area

The latter three Southampton University expeditions were based for much of their duration in the Upper Indus Valley, at the Forestry Department Plantation on the north bank of the Indus River in the village of Tikse, 18 km south-east of Leh, at an altitude of 3,300 m [1].

To the north of Tikse, the Ladakh range of the Himalaya rises to an altitude of 6,000 m within 20 km, and 25 km to the south the Zaskar Range forms a comparable high-altitude barrier, also



Photo: Charles Williams

1. The Forestry Department plantation at Tikse, looking south-west towards the river Indus and the Zaskar range of the Himalayas from Tikse monastery. The location of the Forestry department hut is indicated with an arrow.

parallel to the river, reaching an altitude of 6,200 m (Photo 1). Eighty kilometres to the north of Tikse, the Great Karakoram range reaches an altitude of 6,500 m and the Great Himalaya range reaches a similar altitude 150 km to the south. These four ranges, and the river between them, traverse Ladakh in a roughly north-west to south-east direction, presenting what is assumed to be a significant physical barrier to bird migration in spring and autumn (Mead *et al.* 2007).

Tikse is the south-easternmost of a series of similar plantations extending to the north-west through plantations in Shey, Choglamsur, and Spituk along a 20 km stretch of the Indus River. The Tikse plantation covers an area of about one square kilometre at an altitude of 3,300 m on the northern floodplain of the river. Braided river channels flow through the plantation and the water level varies, being generally high enough to flood the entire plantation in July and August when swelled by meltwater, but dropping through the autumn to a single narrow (and frozen) channel on the southern edge of the plantation in winter.

Vegetation in the Tikse plantation was dominated by young willow *Salix* and poplar *Populus* trees with extensive thickets of sea buckthorn *Hippophae rhamnoides* and *Myricaria*. The plantation at Tikse is one of the most extensive areas of tree and scrub habitat in the Upper Indus Valley and its oasis-like position in a cultivated valley-bottom, amid thousands of square kilometres of arid mountains, explains its attraction to passing migrants in need of rest, food, and shelter.

Methods

All, except one, of the species previously unrecorded in India were trapped or observed during a constant-effort mist netting and migration watching programme run throughout the autumn migration periods in 1977, 1980, and 1981, the winter of 1981–1982, and the spring migration period of 1982. During these periods, the Tikse forestry hut was operated in a similar way to a British bird observatory. About 100–130 m of mist nets were opened at dawn and closed in the late morning each day, and bird observations were carried out throughout the hours of daylight, seven days a week. Afternoons and evenings were usually spent visiting adjacent parts of the Indus Valley and the nets were opened again in the evenings when weather conditions were suitable. A detailed daily log of observations at Tikse and elsewhere in the Upper Indus Valley was recorded. All trapped birds were individually marked with rings provided by the Bombay Natural History Society, had their weight and wing length measured and, if appropriate, their state of moult recorded. Full measurements, including wing formulae, were taken of all rare and unexpected

species that were trapped, and full descriptions and, if possible, photographs (colour transparencies) were taken of these species both in the hand and in the field. For identification, ageing and sexing of birds in the hand, Svensson (1975), and the Williamson *Warbler Guides* (1974, 1976a, 1976b) were indispensable, and we had an appropriate selection of the available field guides to assist with field identification. The ten volumes of Ali & Ripley's *Handbook* (1964–1974) were consulted, together with numerous other papers and reference works, as preparation before each expedition, but comprehensive reference works of a more portable nature only became available after the expeditions, with the publication of Ripley's *Synopsis* in 1982.

Results

In total, 231 species were observed in Ladakh on the four expeditions, of which well over half, an estimated 140 species (90 non-passerines and 50 passerines) were long-distance passage migrants that do not habitually breed in Ladakh. About half of these long-distance passage migrants (71 species) had not previously been recorded in Ladakh.

Altogether, 13 species, all of them long-distance passage migrants, constituted first or second records for India. Table 2 lists the number and status of records of these 13 species recorded by the Southampton University expeditions. As birders and ornithologists with many years' experience in Europe and beyond, we had previous knowledge of all but one, Black-browed Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus bistrigiceps*, of these species. The species accounts that follow provide full details of these records, including field descriptions transcribed directly from observers' notebooks.

In total, 7,623 individual birds of 69 species were trapped and ringed at Tikse on the three later expeditions. Seven of the 13 species listed in Table 2 were recorded by the trapping programme. In the species accounts that follow, biometric data and wing formulae are provided in Tables 3 and 4 respectively. Where more than one individual of a species was trapped, the full details of the description taken are only given for the first bird, along with any differences shown by those trapped subsequently.

Of the species in Table 2, one lacks substantial supporting data. The previous status in India of Eurasian Linnet *Carduelis cannabina* was unrecognised at the time and only limited data were collected. Two other groups of British birders in Ladakh, in 1982, independently recorded Eurasian Linnets in June and July, as far as we are aware, without supporting descriptions or photographs, and the presence of this species in three locations in Ladakh at that time seems beyond question (see below).

Table 2. Number and status of records of species previously unrecorded in India or constituting second records. The numbers refer to the number of individuals seen or captured by the expeditions

Species	First Indian Sub-continent	First India	Second India	Ringed: full biometrics, description, photographs	Field description
Corn Crake	–	–	1	–	1
Little Gull	–	–	2	–	2
European Turtledove	–	–	2	–	1
Lesser Grey Shrike	–	2	–	–	1
Great Reed Warbler	–	1	–	1	–
Black-browed Reed Warbler	1	1	–	1	–
Sedge Warbler	2	2	–	2	–
Garden Warbler	3	3	–	3	–
Barred Warbler	–	–	2	2	–
Song Thrush	1	1	–	1	–
Common Redstart	–	3	–	2	–
Eurasian Linnet	–	1	–	–	–
Yellowhammer	–	1	–	–	1

Corn Crane *Crex crex*

A Corn Crane was seen in the Tikse plantation by David Garbutt on the morning of 19 September 1981. It was flushed at a range of about 6 m and flew in a wide arc before dropping low into the edge of a small reed bed. The following description was taken: "Short-billed large rail, about the size of a Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*. Long dangling legs in flight. Upper parts appear greyer than under parts; pale sandy coloured below and streaked black on mantle. Primaries and secondaries black with paler edges. Wing coverts rusty brown. Tail short."

Previous and subsequent records: A record from Oudh [=Avadh], Uttar Pradesh, was considered unreliable by Hume (1878) because no specimen was preserved. A female was collected in Gilgit, in October 1879 or 1880 (Scully 1881), and Zugmayer collected one in September 1906 at the Kisu La, near Pangong Lake, in the outer plateau area of Ladakh, disputed by China and India, and now controlled by China (Vaurie 1972). Our 1981 record could thus be considered a first for India, but we have included it as a second. There have been two records since, in the Andaman Islands in January 2007 (Pande 2007), and in eastern Ladakh, at Tso Moriri Lake in September 2012, when an excellent photograph was taken (Prasad 2012).

Little Gull *Larus minutus*

A first winter bird was seen at Choglamsur on 27 and 28 August 1980. Diagnostic points of the description taken at the time were its small size (compared with a Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*, which mobbed it), rather blunt wings with diagonal dark bars, a dark terminal band on the slightly cleft white tail, grey mantle and buoyant tern-like flight. On 29 August 1981, another juvenile was recorded at Tikse.

Previous and subsequent records: Assuming that the two 1980 records referred to the same individual, these were the second and third records for the Indian Subcontinent, the first having been collected by Walter Koelz at Spituk, 7 km west of Choglamsur, on 21 September 1936 (Vaurie 1972). After the end of the 1981–1982 expedition, on a visit by expedition members to Baltistan, two juvenile Little Gulls were seen on the Indus River near Skardu on 22 August 1982, with a single individual at the same location the next day on 23rd.

European Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur*

Two European Turtle Doves were recorded from the Tikse plantation in the spring of 1982, on 8 May and 24 May. Charles Williams took the following description of the first individual: "Smaller and slighter than Rufous Turtledove *Streptopelia orientalis* (initially mistaken for Collared Dove [Eurasian Collared Dove *S. decaocto*]). Paler under parts than Rufous Turtledove and dark feather centres less prominent on wing coverts. Rump only slightly greyer than back. Necklace black and white, with three big black stripes and relatively wide, pale borders. Close view but light fading."

Previous and subsequent records: The species was reported by Ripley (1982) as a straggler to Gilgit and Balochistan, but no details of any records were given. Pfister (2004) describes it as a rare passage migrant/vagrant, and mentions records in the Shey–Tikse areas (probably ours) and near Hundar, but no dates or other details are given.

Lesser Grey Shrike *Lanius minor*

Two Lesser Grey Shrikes were recorded in the spring of 1982, on 24 May at Tikse and 21 June at Shey. The following notes were taken of the first observation: "Size approx as *L. schach*; Black mask extends to crown above bill, clear white chin and throat; breast, belly and flanks pale buff; tail black with white outer feathers, wing feathers black with white patch at primary bases; crown, mantle and rump pale grey. Wing patches prominent in flight, forming a crescent over the primary bases, and bigger and clearer than *L. schach*, even when at rest."

Previous and subsequent records: Ripley (1982) mentioned two records from Pakistan in Quetta and Chaman, but the 1982 Tikse and Shey records appear to have been the first records for India.

Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus*

An adult was trapped and ringed at Tikse on 16 August 1977 [2, 3]. It was probably the eastern form, *Acrocephalus arundinaceus zarudnyi*, but the plumage was very worn, preventing conclusive sub-species identification.

Tables 3 and 4 summarise the measurements that were taken and the wing formula.

Description

Soft parts: Upper mandible very dark brown, lower mandible: basal half very dark brown, distal half pinkish grey, yellowish at very tip. Legs: outer surfaces pinkish grey, inner yellowish grey, soles greenish. Centre of toe scales bluish grey. Mouth orange-red, iris warm mid brown.



2. Adult Great Reed Warbler.



Photo: Charles Williams

3. Adult Great Reed Warbler.

Upper parts: Colour much as autumn adult *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*, dull mid brown, slightly greyer on the crown than rest of upper parts. Rump appears blotched with grey due to worn and faded feather tips. Accidental moult of fourth inner tail feather on right side – at moult stage 3.

Under parts: Chin and belly white; upper breast, flanks, under wing coverts and under tail coverts warm buff.

Identification: The superficially similar Clamorous Reed Warbler *A. stentoreus* was excluded on the basis of measurements and wing formula, as described in Williamson (1974). Clamorous Reed Warbler has an even longer bill than Great Reed (range

23.5–28 mm; our bird was 22 mm). It also has a considerably more rounded tail (Tail difference 13–17 mm; our bird was at the lower end of Great Reed Warbler at 5 mm). Finally, the wing formula was typical of Great Reed Warbler, having emarginations on the third primary only (Clamorous Reed 3rd, 4th, and 5th) and the wing point formed by the 2nd and 3rd primaries (Clamorous Reed 3rd and 4th). Thick-billed Warbler *A. aedon* has a thicker, shorter bill and much rounder wing and tail.

Previous and subsequent records: This appears to have been the first record for India. There is one, earlier record from the Indian Subcontinent at Kalat, north Balochistan in October (Ripley 1982). Subsequent to our record, an individual ringed at Kazakhstan SSR, Chimkent O, Kizilkumsky region (42°59'N, 68°25'E) on 25 May 1989, was captured and re-ringed on 9 December 1990 at Senpukur, Baj Bay (c. 22°15'N, 88°12'E), 16 km west-south-west of Kolkata (Ali & Ripley 2001).

Black-browed Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus bistrigiceps*

A juvenile Black-browed Reed Warbler was trapped and ringed at Tikse on 12 October 1980 [4]. It was identified using a combination of measurements, wing formula, and plumage characteristics—particularly the broad, creamy supercilia surmounted by slightly narrower, heavy black 'brows'. Tables 3 and 4 summarise the measurements that were taken and the wing formula. The wing formula was close, but not identical to the average described by Williamson (1974), and the measurements (demonstrating its small size) and plumage characteristics indicate that identification was beyond doubt.

Description

Soft parts: Iris dark brown; upper mandible dark horn, lower mandible: basal half pinkish, distal half pinkish with a horn coloured patch on either side, cutting edges

Table 3. Biometric data of species trapped at Tikse

Date	Species and Ring number	Age/ Sex	Wing mm	Bill length (to skull) mm	Bill width mm	Bill depth mm	Tarsus mm	Tail mm	Tail difference mm	Weight gm
16 August 1977	Great Reed Warbler AB72343	Adult	91 abraded	22.0	6 at nostrils	5.5 at nostrils	32	72	5	25.1
12 October 1980	Black-browed Reed Warbler Z9405	Juvenile	52	14.5	4	3	19.5	45	10	7.9
20 September 1981	Sedge Warbler Z34164	Juvenile	68	15.5	4.5	3	20.5	46	7.5	10.4
11 October 1981	Sedge Warbler Z34536	Juvenile	67	16	4	3	22	47.5	8	12.9
26 September 1980	Garden Warbler A161496	Juvenile	79	16	4	4	21.5	55	2	17.4
09 October 1980	Garden Warbler A161700	Juvenile	77	14	4	4	20	55	4	17.4
10 September 1981	Garden Warbler Z18482	Juvenile	81	14	5	4	20.5	58	4	16.9
18 September 1980	Barred Warbler AB80281	Juvenile	87	18	6	5	25	71.5	5.5	27.3
23 September 1981	Barred Warbler B46692	Juvenile	87	17	6	5	23.5	69	4	22.0
14 December 1981	Song Thrush B56009	Juvenile	120	22	7	6	33	87	-	72
05 May 1982	Common Redstart A201463	Juv male	79	13	5	4	20	58	-	13.7
06 May 1982	Common Redstart A201467	Juv male	83	13	5	4	22	63	-	15.0

Table 4. Wing formula measurements of species trapped at Tikse

Date	Species And ring number	Primaries										Secondaries	Emargination / Notch	
		1 from pc	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10			
16 August 1977	Great Reed Warbler AB72343	-9	0	0	1.5	5	9	12.5	16	19	23	25	E3, N(2)	17.5
12 October 1980	Black-browed Reed Warbler Z9405	+2.5	6.5	1	0	0	2	4	5.5	7	9	-	E345	
20 September 1981	Sedge Warbler Z34164	-3.5	2.5	0	2.5	5	7.5	9.5	12	14.5	17	19.5	E3	
11 October 1981	Sedge Warbler Z34536	-2	1.5	0	3	5	7.5	10	12	14.5	17	18	E3	
26 September 1980	Garden Warbler A161496	-5.5	1.5	0	3.5	7	9.5	12	15	17.5	21	21	E345	
09 October 1980	Garden Warbler A161700	-4	1.5	0	1.5	6	9	11	13.5	16	18.5	22	E345	
10 September 1981	Garden Warbler Z18482	-6.5	2	0	3	7.5	9	12.5	15.5	18	21	24	E34(5)	
18 September 1980	Barred Warbler AB80281	-6	0	0	1	4	7	10	12.5	15.5	18	20	E345	
23 September 1981	Barred Warbler B46692	-4.5	0	0	1.5	4	7	10	13	16	18.5	21	E34(5)	
05 May 1982	Common Redstart A201463	-	=5-6	0	(0)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	E345	
06 May 1982	Common Redstart A201467	+8	7	0	0.5	4	8.5	12.5	15	18	19	21.5	E345, N(2)	20

yellowish. Legs and feet grey, tarsi with pinkish tinge; soles ochre.

Upper parts: Crown warm mid-brown at front, greyish olive brown at rear; very broad cream supercilia from nostrils, over lores and over and behind eyes, ending over rear of ear coverts. Above supercilium is a slightly narrower, very prominent black streak from above lores and all along supercilium to its end; ear coverts rufous buff; nape, mantle and lesser coverts olive brown; rump more rufous; greater coverts, median coverts, primary coverts, bastard wing, primaries, secondaries and tertials all have



4. Juvenile Black-browed Reed Warbler.



Photos: John Norton

4a. Black-browed Reed Warbler.

blackish brown centres and rufous brown fringes, greater and median coverts have broad rufous brown tips; tail feathers very dark brown, outer webs broadly fringed rufous brown, the tips narrowly paler.

Under parts: Chin white, malar region with creamy suffusion, lower throat, upper breast, flanks and vent creamy buff, belly white with creamy wash, axillaries and under wing coverts creamy with greyish wash towards rear.

Previous and subsequent records: This is a species which breeds in eastern Asia and winters predominantly in South-east Asia, and at the time of the record it was thought to have been recorded in Assam, Manipur, and Bengal (Ripley 1982). Rasmussen & Anderton (2005) considered these records to be hypothetical. In the second edition of their book (2012), however, they included a series of records from <http://orientalbirdimages.org/> comprising a singing bird in April 2009 near Kolkata, a series of seven records near Kolkata in March 2011, and one in the Andaman Islands in March 2012. They also considered records from NE and S Bangladesh to be valid. Inskipp & Inskipp (1985) detailed individuals wintering in Nepal in each of 1981, 1982 and 1983, and the bird at Tikse, in the autumn of 1980, appears to have been the first record for the Indian Subcontinent.

Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

Two juvenile Sedge Warblers were trapped and ringed at Tikse in the autumn of 1981, on 20 September [5] and 11 October [6]. Tables 3 and 4 summarise the measurements that were taken and the wing formula of each bird.

20 September 1981: Description

Soft parts: Upper mandible very dark brown, lower mandible ochre at tip, central portion grey, basal half pink.

Legs and feet purplish grey with green tinge, especially on feet; Soles ochre, eye dark brown, gape orange.

Head: Broad, creamy supercilium from above lores to the same distance behind eye; narrow blackish streak below supercilium, lores greyish-brown, ear coverts mottled mid-brown.

Upper parts: Feathers of crown, nape, mantle, lesser, median and greater coverts black centred with mid-brown fringes. Rump feathers unstreaked, warm, almost yellowish brown, lacking dark centres. Upper tail coverts similar to rump, with slightly darker brown feather centres. Tail feathers dark brown, paler, greyish at tips and on outer webs of outer pair. Tertials and greater coverts brown centred with creamy-buff fringes. Secondaries dark brown centred with narrow brown fringes and small whitish tips.



Photo: Clare Siskion

5. Sedge Warbler trapped on 20 September 1981.



Photo: Clare Sulston

6. Sedge Warbler trapped on 11 October 1981.

Primaries dark brown centred with very narrow brown fringes and small whitish tips to inner seven. Primary coverts dark brown with slight warm brown fringes. Bastard wing – large feather similar to primary coverts, small feather with marked creamy edges.

Under parts: Chin and belly white; throat, upper breast, flanks and vent creamy; legs to vent brownish; under wing coverts greyish white.

11 October 1981: Description

This bird was darker and had more olive tones in the plumage. The ear coverts were described as “mottled ginger & pale olive brown.” It lacked the small whitish tips on the secondaries and inner primaries and had a gorget of small spots below the throat. It was carrying noticeable deposits of sub-cutaneous fat.

Identification: Eastern Moustached Warbler *Acrocephalus melanogonon mimica* is very similar in appearance to Sedge Warbler, but was excluded on differences in measurements, wing formula and colouration, as summarised in Williamson (1974). Eastern Moustached Warbler shows a different head pattern (shorter, broader, whiter supercilium and small moustachial stripe) and the flanks and under tail coverts are washed with pinkish-brown, not yellowish. Moustached Warbler is shorter-winged than Sedge Warbler; *mimica* having a wing length in the range of 59–67 mm (our birds were 67 and 68 mm). The tail length of *mimica* is, however, longer on average than Sedge (49–60 mm) and our birds were 46 and 47.5 mm. Eastern Moustached Warbler has a more rounded tail than Sedge Warbler (Tail difference 9–12 mm) and as with tail length, our birds fell within the range of Sedge Warbler at 7.5 and 8 mm. The wing formula of our birds also fitted Sedge Warbler, the main differences being that they were emarginated only on the third primary (Moustached is also emarginated on 4th and 5th) and had the wing point formed by the third



Photo: John Norton

7. Garden Warbler: 26 September 1980.

primary (Moustached wing is more rounded, the point formed by the 4th or 4th–5th primaries).

These were the first, and so far the only records of Sedge Warbler for the Indian Subcontinent.

Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin*

Three juvenile Garden Warblers were trapped and ringed at Tikse in the autumns of 1980 and 1981, on 26 September and 9 October 1980, and 10 September 1981. All were readily identified by a combination of plumage characteristics, measurements and wing formula. Tables 3 and 4 summarise the measurements that were taken and the wing formula of each bird.

26 September 1980: Description [7]

Soft parts: Upper mandible very dark grey, bluish at base; Lower mandible very dark grey at tip, pinkish in centre, bluish on cutting edges; legs dark blueish grey, soles with ochre tinge; Iris very dark brown.

Head: Very short, whitish supercilium immediately above eye; ear coverts suffused grey.

Upper parts: Crown, nape, mantle, rump and wing coverts rather uniform mid-brown. Rectrices and remiges darker brown.

Under parts: Chin white, throat and breast cream-white, belly and vent white. Flanks olive-buff. Under wing coverts creamy buff.

9 October 1980: Description

This bird differed from the previous individual in having a whitish eye-ring, above the eye only. The lores, malar region and a collar immediately behind the ear coverts were distinctly grey, the feathers being brown with grey tips. This grey area extended to the sides of the upper breast. The under wing coverts were a very warm creamy buff.

10 September 1981 [8]

See biometric and wing formula data (Tables 3 and 4).

Photo: Claire Sulston



8. Garden Warbler: 10 September 1981.

These were the first records of Garden Warbler for the Indian Subcontinent, and none have been recorded since.

Barred Warbler *Sylvia nisoria*

Two juvenile Barred Warblers were trapped and ringed at Tikse, on 18 September 1980 and 23 September 1981. Both were readily identified by a combination of plumage characteristics, measurements and wing formula. Tables 3 and 4 summarise the measurements that were taken and the wing formula of each bird.

18 September 1980: Description [9]

Soft parts: Iris pale greenish grey; upper mandible, distal half dark horn, basal half brownish horn, cutting edges greyish; lower mandible, basal half pinkish grey, distal half horn, greyish in centre; legs and feet bluish grey, soles ochre.

Upper parts: Crown greyish brown, browner on forehead and over eye; eye ring brown above, cream below; nape and mantle darkish grey-brown; rump and lesser coverts similar, but edged sandy-buff; bastard wing, primary, median and greater coverts dark brown, edged greyish buff, warmer on greater coverts; primaries, secondaries and tertials dark greyish brown, tipped and faintly edged greyish buff; axillaries greyish with creamy suffusion towards body; Tail feathers dark brownish grey, the outer pair with very narrow white outer edges and small thorn-shaped white patches at tips of inner webs.

Under parts: Chin, throat and belly white, breast and flanks white, suffused creamy buff, under tail coverts whitish, barred grey, the grey barring formed by dark feather centres. Considerable deposits of sub-cutaneous fat on belly and throat.

Photo: John Norton



9. Barred Warbler: 18 September 1980.

23 September 1981: Description [10]

The 1981 bird was a greyer looking individual, differing from the 1980 bird in its pale greyish-brown eyes, the barring on the under tail coverts extending a little up the flanks, and having slight white inner edges to the second outermost tail feathers.

Previous and subsequent records: There are two previous records of Barred Warbler for the Indian Subcontinent, one of them from Ladakh. Biddulph collected one in Gilgit on 6 September 1869 (Kinnear 1931), and the other was shot in the Shyok Valley in northern Ladakh on 2 July 1930 (Sillem 1934). Holmes (1986) trapped a Juvenile on 2 September 1983 in the scrub below Kun peak in the Suru Valley, constituting the fifth record for the Indian



10. Barred Warbler: 2 September 1981.

Photo: Claire Sulston

subcontinent and the fourth for Ladakh. It was the third record in Ladakh in three years, suggesting the possibility that the species is a regular migrant.

Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*

An individual first seen by Clive Denby on 24 November 1981 remained in the Tikse area for three weeks, being observed again on 25 and 28 November, and 6, 7, 12, 13 and 14 December [11, 12]. The bird was trapped and ringed on 14 December 1981 and the following description was taken. This superseded the field description that had already been obtained. Table 3 summarises the measurements that were recorded.

Description:

Soft parts: Iris blackish brown. Upper mandible horn, yellowish at cutting edges; lower mandible horn at centre of base and tip, yellow along cutting edges and in median portion, with pinkish patch on median portion where yellow joins horn; legs pinkish brown, purplish on the joints with yellow at tibio-tarsal joint; soles ochre, gape yellowish orange.

Head: Lores mid-grey; Supercilium indistinct, greyish-white, extending from above eye and fading out to rear of ear coverts; ear coverts mottled cream, mid-brown and blackish, distinctly darker along margins, especially the upper and rear margins; tiny feathers form fairly conspicuous whitish eye ring.

Upper parts: Crown and mantle mid earth brown, nape slightly greyer; rump and upper tail coverts mid brownish-grey with olive tinge; tail dark rufous brown, especially rufous on outer webs; lesser and median coverts warm mid-brown, medians with broad



11. Song Thrush: 14 December 1981.



Photos: Clare Sulston

12. Song Thrush: 14 December 1981.

creamy-buff tips extending up feather shafts, greater coverts warm dark brown with tips as median coverts, primary coverts—outer webs warm rufous brown, inner webs dark blackish brown; bastard wing—inner webs blackish brown, outer webs mid-brown; primaries blackish brown with narrow rufous fringes and pale creamy patches at base of inner webs; secondaries dark brown with slight rufous tinge.

Under parts: Chin white, bordered by small, elongated, blackish spots and a white area between these spots and the ear coverts; throat creamy white with distinct blackish oval spots; breast warm creamy buff with blackish heart-shaped spots; belly and flanks white with blackish oval and heart-shaped spots. Note – where spots appear heart-shaped it is due to the feather tips being spread. Vent feathers white with pale buffy brown fringes at feather bases; axillaries and under wing coverts warm orangey buff.

Call when flying off—a quiet but penetrating “*tsip*.”

Subsequent records: This was the first record of Song Thrush for the Indian Subcontinent, but it has been seen subsequently near Bharatpur (Rasmussen & Anderton 2005, 2012).

Common Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*

Single juvenile males were trapped at Tikse on 5 and 6 May 1982 and a third was seen on 25 May. Tables 3 and 4 summarise the measurements and the wing formulae of the two trapped birds [13, 14].



13. Common Redstart.



14. Common Redstart.

Photos: Clare Sulston

5 May: Description

Soft parts: Iris chocolate brown; Upper mandible black, lower mandible black with yellow basal quarter; legs and feet brownish horn, soles dull ochre.

Upper parts: Crown, nape and mantle mid "battleship" grey with narrow brown feather tips; lores and area immediately over base of bill black, fore crown white, extending in a patch to above and behind eye; rump, upper tail coverts and tail orange, central pair of tail feathers very dark brown; lesser and median coverts dark brownish centred, appearing mid-grey due to broad grey fringes; bastard wing, primary coverts, greater coverts, tertials, secondaries and primaries dark brown with paler brown fringes, these fringes inclining to rufous on greater coverts and carpal covert.

Under parts: Chin and throat black, feathers narrowly tipped white; breast and flanks orange with white feather tips; belly white; vent washed-out orange; axillaries and under wing coverts washed-out orange.

6 May: Description

Differed from the previous day's bird in more prominent white tips to the throat feathers and less distinct white patch on the fore crown.

Previous and subsequent records: Ripley (1982) described the Common Redstart as a passage migrant in northern Balochistan and Chitral, but these were the first records for India.

Eurasian Linnet *Carduelis cannabina*

A female individual of this extremely distinctive finch was seen and heard clearly on 1 July 1982 at Sungdo, 25 km south of Tikse between Hemis and the Gongmaru La. The observers are very familiar with the species but did not realise the significance of the record at the time, and no notes were taken. A second individual, which preceded ours by three days, and so constituted the first record, was reported by visiting British birders Richard Fairbanks, Dave Mills and Nick Preston. It was seen in Stok on 27 June 1982. Craig Robson, Rodney Martins and James Wolstencroft reported a further six individuals above Leh on 6 July 1982.

Previous and subsequent records: Ripley (1982) described the Linnet as a winter visitor to Pakistan, mentioning seven districts where it has been recorded, but he made no mention of records for India. Pfister (2004) described the species as a sporadic vagrant to Ladakh in June–July and mentioned records in the lower Stok Valley and above Leh (probably those detailed above), but no dates or other details were given. A more recent record was reported by den Besten (2004) who saw the species in Kangra, Himachal Pradesh.

Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella*

A male Yellowhammer was seen in the Tikse plantation by Simon Delany early on 4 December 1981 with a roosting flock of at least 25 Pine Buntings *Emberiza leucocephalos*. The two typical calls of the species were heard, a nasal "chiz" and the flight call, a rapidly repeated "tip-tip-tip." It was sitting in full view no more than five metres away and uttered a distinctive "chiz" call soon after being located. It was seen from the side for about half a minute, and then briefly from the rear as it turned, then flew off. The following features were noted: "Bright lemon yellow crown, superciliary area, cheeks, chin, throat, breast and belly. Indistinct head pattern formed by narrow blackish margins to ear

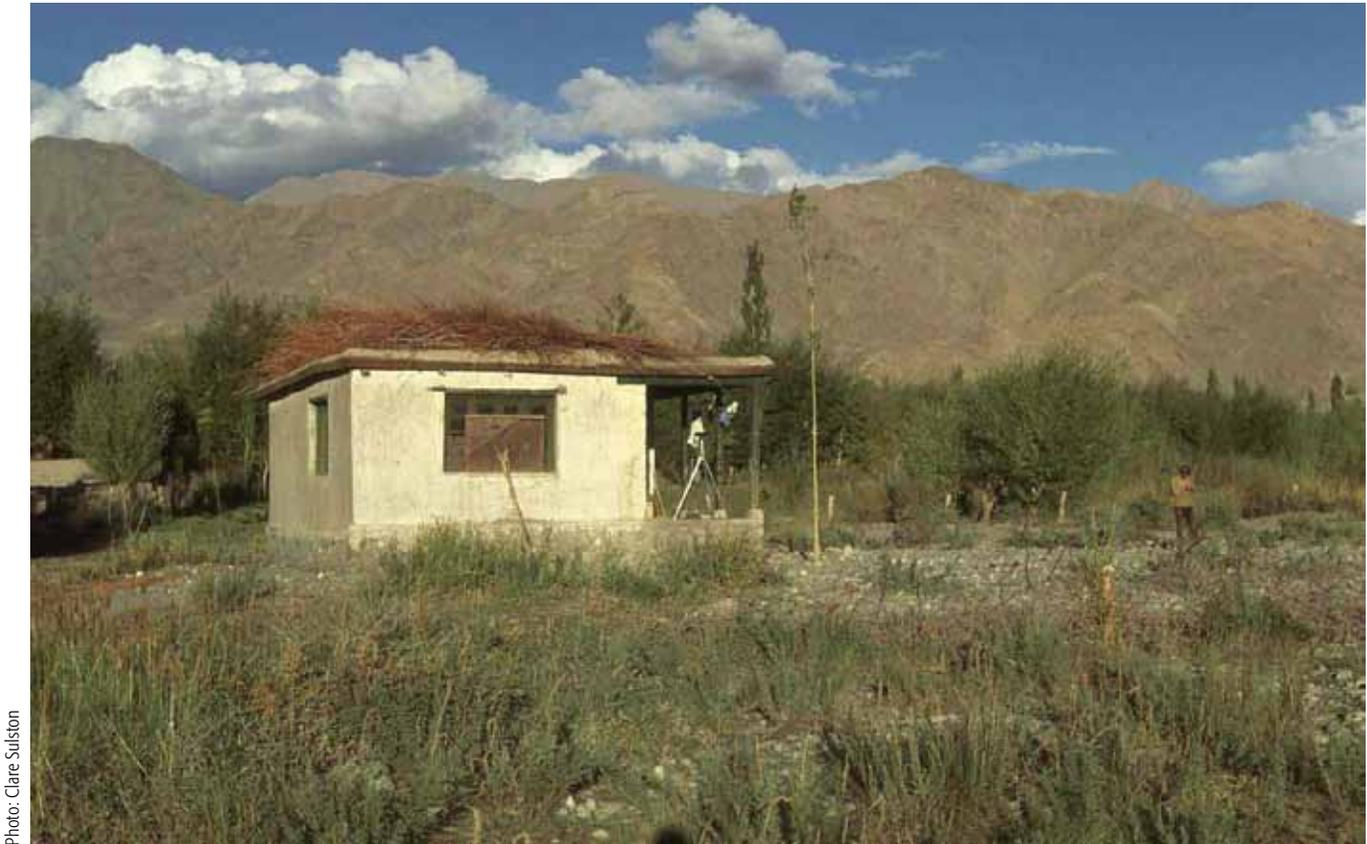


Photo: Clare Sulston

14. Bird-ringing station at Tikse, Ladakh.

coverts, dark line through eye and (indistinctly) above superciliary area. Dense chestnut streaks on flanks nearly join across breast. Nape, mantle and wing coverts warm mid brown with blackish streaking. Rump chestnut, tail and remiges blackish, outer pair of tail feathers appearing white in flight. Indistinct buffish bar formed by tips to greater coverts, and even less distinct one on median coverts. Size and structure identical to the Pine Buntings it was with."

Previous and subsequent records: This was the first record for India, but in February 1924, a hybrid *citrinella* / *leucocephalos* was collected at Urak in northern Balochistan (Ticehurst 1934). The first record for the Indian Subcontinent was observed by T. Baker, R. Mills and N. Preston on 25 February 1981, less than ten months before the Tikse record, in Kagbeni, Nepal (Inskipp & Inskipp 1985). Since the 1981 records, at least two male Yellowhammers were recorded with Pine Buntings above Dharamshala in Himachal Pradesh on four dates in late January 2012, following a period of unusually heavy snowfall (Sharma *et al.* 2013).

Discussion

Table 5 lists the known breeding and wintering ranges of the 13 species recorded for the first or second time in India by the Southampton University expeditions. They can be broken down into three categories:

- Eight species on migration routes between sub-Saharan Africa and Asia (Corn Crane, European Turtle Dove, Lesser Grey Shrike, Great Reed Warbler, Sedge Warbler, Garden Warbler, Barred Warbler and Common Redstart).

- Four species whose migrations largely remain within the Palearctic region, and which occurred well to the south and east of their known, normal ranges (Little Gull, Song Thrush, Eurasian Linnet and Yellowhammer).
- One species, (Black-browed Reed Warbler) a long way west of its known range, and separated from it by the Tibetan Plateau and the vast complex of mountains and deserts in Central Asia.

A majority of the birds recorded at Tikse were probably local breeders and altitudinal migrants, with a good number and variety of Palearctic species migrating through the Himalayas to wintering grounds in lowland India. The variety of Palearctic–African migrants was remarkable. Ten more Palearctic–African migrant species were observed in addition to the eight detailed in this paper, although numbers of most of these were low and it remains uncertain whether they were vagrants, or whether they were using established migration routes. There were also three records of Honey Buzzards (*Pernis* sp.) that may have been European Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus* (another African-wintering species) but observations were not sufficiently detailed to separate them safely from Oriental (or Crested) Honey Buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus*. We therefore recommend that future observers should pay special attention to any records of Honey Buzzards in Ladakh.

Two of the warbler species, the Sedge Warbler trapped on 11 October 1981, and the Barred Warbler trapped on 18 September 1980 were carrying substantial deposits of sub-cutaneous fat, suggesting that they were able to find sufficient food at Tikse, or somewhere not very distant, to engage in refuelling along the route of their migration. In the light of this, the perception of

Table 5. Known breeding and wintering ranges of rarities recorded at Tikse 1977-1982
 [Source: Summarized from BirdLife International website: <http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/home>]

Species	Breeding range	Wintering range	Notes on Ladakh records
Corn Crake	Europe, W & Central Asia	Southern and East Africa	Palaearctic-African migrant recorded in autumn
Little Gull	NE Europe to Central & E Asia	E Asia, SW Asia, S and W Europe	Migrant within Palaearctic, well south of expected route
European Turtle Dove	Europe, W & Central Asia	Sub-Saharan Africa N of equator	Palaearctic-African migrant recorded in spring
Lesser Grey Shrike	S & E Europe to Central Asia	Southern Africa	Palaearctic-African migrant recorded in spring
Great Reed Warbler	Mid-latitude Europe and Asia	Sub-Saharan Africa, SE Asia	Palaearctic-African migrant recorded in autumn
Black-browed Reed Warbler	East Asia	South-east Asia	Autumn migrant well west of known area of distribution
Sedge Warbler	Europe, W & Central Asia	Sub-Saharan Africa	Palaearctic-African migrant recorded in autumn
Garden Warbler	Europe, W & Central Asia	Sub-Saharan Africa	Palaearctic-African migrant recorded in autumn
Barred Warbler	Central & E Europe to Central Asia	East Africa	Palaearctic-African migrant recorded in autumn
Song Thrush	Europe to Central Asia	S & W Europe, N Africa, Middle East	Migrant within Palaearctic, wintering c. 2000 km east of known wintering range
Common Redstart	Europe, W & Central Asia	Sub-Saharan Africa N of equator	Palaearctic-African migrant recorded in spring
Eurasian Linnet	Europe, N Africa, W & Central Asia	S Europe, N Africa, W & Central Asia	Migrant within Palaearctic, recorded in summer about 1000 km south of known regular breeding range
Yellowhammer	Europe, W & Central Asia	Europe to S Central Asia	Migrant within Palaearctic, wintering c. 1000 km south of known regular wintering range

the Himalayan ranges as a hostile barrier to migration may be exaggerated, and the number and variety of migrants that we observed and trapped would support the view that long-distance migrants, in some numbers, regularly traverse these ranges.

As well as the four intra-Palaearctic migrant species mentioned so far, an additional 14 were observed by the expeditions. It seems a regular occurrence for birds migrating west and south from Siberia and Central Asia to stray into the Himalayas.

Finally, two other warbler species that winter predominantly in South-east Asia, like Black-browed Reed Warbler, were trapped and ringed in small numbers at Tikse, namely Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus* and Yellow-browed warbler *Phylloscopus inornatus*. These seem likely to have been individuals from the western extremity of the breeding ranges heading for western parts of the winter ranges in north-eastern India.

Considerably more work is needed to better understand the number and variety of individuals and species migrating through the Himalayas, the routes they use, and the importance of vegetated valley bottoms as staging areas.

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 James Channabasappa Uttangi
 1916 – 2014

Some significant avian records from Odisha

Dipu Karuthedathu, Vinay Das, Praveen J., Vijay Ramachandran & Sachin Shurpali

With notes by Manoj V. Nair

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Ornithological studies conducted in the eastern state of Odisha, India, have been few and far between. There have been some studies in Chilika Lake and its surroundings as a part of wetland bird count (Balachandran *et al.* 2009). A couple of avifaunal inventories are available for Bhitarkanika National Park situated further north (Pandav 1997; Gopi & Pandav 2007). Similipal Tiger Reserve is far less studied than the other two areas; Ripley's (1979) being the only definite work. However, in comparison with other regions of India, there is a definite paucity of ornithological surveys in this state.

In the last decade, Mangalajodi (19°55'N, 85°25'E) near Chilika Lake has gained prominence as a conservation success story with erstwhile poachers turning professional guides (<http://mangalajodiecotourism.com/>). However, despite the sightings and photographs of rare birds like Spotted Crane *Porzana porzana* from Mangalajodi (Sreenivasan 2012), there is still little interest in terms of general birding in Odisha. As compared to surrounding states like West Bengal or even the southern states, Odisha is seldom visited by amateur birdwatchers and photographers. This is probably due to a lack of publicity for the various birding spots and the relative difficulty in arranging the logistics. Keeping this in mind, we (DK, VD, PJ, VR, and SS) decided to venture into this sparsely 'birded' land to visit some of the famous birding sites and also hoping to add to the existing knowledge wherever possible. A detailed itinerary was chalked out with the help of MVN who is stationed in Sambalpur, Odisha.

We planned the trip in three legs – Chilika including Nalaban (19°41'N, 85°18'E) & Mangalajodi, Bhitarkanika National Park (henceforth BNP), and Similipal Tiger Reserve (henceforth STR) – spending on an average three days in each leg spanning ten days from 22 to 31 December 2012. A combined checklist of 268 species was recorded during the trip: 204 in the Chilika sector including Barbara forests (19°51'N, 85°01'E), 140 in the Bhitarkanika sector, and 96 in the Similipal sector.

This note discusses the significant sightings in detail, while mentioning other sightings of interest. Since existing field guides

and books do not provide updated status information for many species, notes on current status are added by MVN, who has been visiting the state since 1996, and is a resident bird-watcher since 2006. Such notes appear within brackets after each species account.

Greater White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons*

Every year, the Odisha Forest Department conducts a bird census in BNP and Chilika in the month of December. This year, the census was conducted a week before we reached there. During the survey, Bivash Pandav and R. Suresh Kumar from Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun had spotted a single "white-fronted goose" at Satabaya wetlands, Gupti (20°38'N, 86°53'E) in Kendrapara Dt., which was tentatively identified by them as a Lesser White-fronted Goose *A. erythropus*. Since this is a rare bird for Odisha, we specifically checked the area from where *A. erythropus* was reported, but could only spot Bar-headed Geese *A. indicus*. After birding in Dangamal (20°44'N, 86°52'E), the main entry point of BNP, while we were returning to Gupti on 29 December, we saw a gaggle of around 300 Bar-headed Geese on the Dhamra River (20°45'N, 86°49'E). We stopped and scanned the flock through a spotting scope and, within no time, were able to locate one bird in that flock that seemed distinctive. A few characteristics of a white-fronted goose were visible on it—dark head, darker body, pink bill, and similarity in size to the surrounding Bar-headed Geese—but a "white front" was missing. Since the birds were floating quite far from the shore, we hired a fishing boat to get closer. We approached the birds without disturbing the flock and obtained some clear photographs. Even at that point, conclusively deciding between Lesser and Greater White-fronted Goose was difficult as the bird was a juvenile. Once back in the vehicle, a detailed analysis of the images showed the typical head and bill structure, and lack of a yellow eye-ring of a Greater White-fronted Goose *A. albifrons* [15]. The images were sent to Mike Prince, and Frederik Willemyns, who were familiar with both species of white-fronted geese, and both concurred with our conclusions. Since the previous week's sighting of the white-fronted goose by Bivash Pandav and Suresh Kumar was also under similar circumstances (among Bar-headed Geese) and not far from our sighting (~20 km apart), we feel that the previous bird may have also been a Greater White-fronted Goose.



15. Greater White-fronted Goose among Bar-headed Geese near Dangamal



16. Leucistic Garganey from Managalajodi.

[This bird was sighted once on 12 December 1948, on Chilika Lake (Craven 1948); it is far more regular in northern India (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). Since then, there have been unconfirmed sight records of white-fronted geese, either *A. albifrons* or *A. erythropus*, from Chilika over the years; however, the only recent confirmed species level report has been that of a pair of *A. erythropus* from the marshes between Sundarpur and Bhusandpur of the northern sector of Chilika lake during December 2004 (Balachandran *et al.* 2009). Thus, the present report is possibly the first confirmed photographic record of *A. albifrons* from Odisha. — MVN]

Leucistic Garganey *Anas querquedula*

While watching a large flotilla of ducks in Mangalajodi on 23 December, an almost completely white bird suddenly caught our attention among Garganeys *A. querquedula* and Northern Shovelers *A. clypeata*. This leucistic duck was smaller than the shovelers; it flocked along with the Garganeys, was of similar size and structure, both in flight and while swimming [16, 17], had a black eye, and dark beak (*contra* an albino). Hence we concluded it was a leucistic Garganey.

[Garganey is an addition to the list of albino/leucistic anatids reported from the Indian Subcontinent; the others being Greylag Goose *A. anser* (Editors 1950; Abdulali 1966), Northern Shoveler (Bolster 1923; Dharmakumarsinhji 1975), Lesser Whistling Duck *Dendrocygna javanica* (Chatterjee 1995), Knob-billed Duck *Sarkidiornis melanotos* (Newnham & Aitken 1886), Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea* (Whistler 1940), Gadwall *A.*



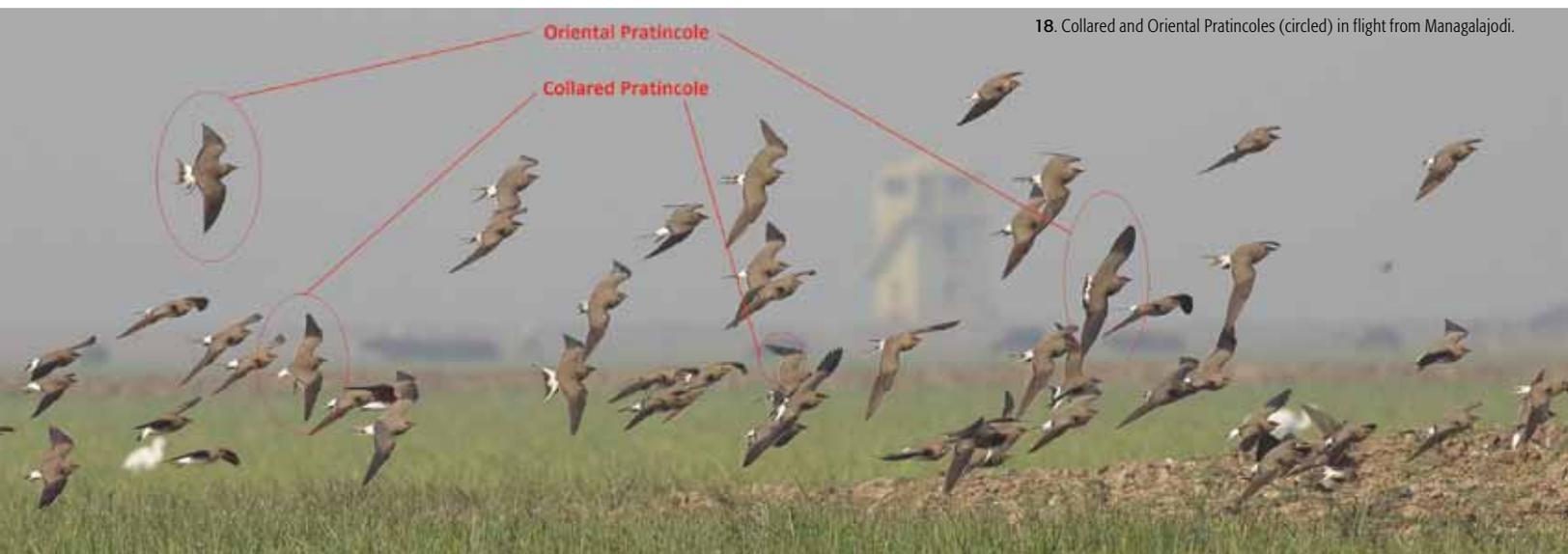
17. Leucistic Garganey in flight along with other Garganeys from Mangalajodi.

strepera (Harrison & Harrison 1972), and Indian Spot-billed Duck *Anas poecilorhyncha* (Sharma *et al.* 2010).—MVN]

Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola*

On the morning of 23 December 2012, at Mangalajodi, from our boat we spotted a flock of c. 25 pratincoles, perched on a mound c. 100 m away. Initially, we thought they were Oriental Pratincoles *G. maldivarum*, based on known distribution ranges, but while scoping them from the moving boat, we noticed that some of the birds showed long tail streamers that extended beyond the wing tips, which is a pointer for Collared Pratincole. So, more photographs were taken of both, sitting, and flying birds. During our field observations, the trailing edges of the secondaries were not noticeable, but off-field analysis of the images clearly revealed the key features of Collared Pratincoles: prominent white trailing edges of secondaries, relatively longer tail streamers, and darker upper parts. Identification was made slightly easier as the same flock had a few Oriental Pratincoles as well. These birds showed no white trailing edges to secondaries, had relatively shorter tail streamers, and darker upper parts. See the marked birds in [18] for comparison (Driessens & Svensson 2005). Gerald Driessens, who has done extensive research on Collared and Oriental Pratincoles, also confirmed the identification of the marked birds (Gerald Driessens *pers. comm.* January 2013).

[Balachandran *et al.* (2009) consider this bird a 'rare local migrant' to Chilika and state that a few pairs were recorded at Bhusandpur and Sundarpur regions, while one individual was ringed in 1984 at Nalaban. The interesting point in the present



18. Collared and Oriental Pratincoles (circled) in flight from Managalajodi.

report is that the birds were seen intermixed with the commoner breeding visitor Oriental Pratincole in the same flock. This is a pointer for birders to carefully scan any sizeable flock of pratincoles that they might come across in the wetlands of Odisha, especially during winter. However, far upstream of the Mahanadi River, on the banks of Hirakud reservoir (21°34'N, 83°50'E) and adjoining wetlands (Sambalpur Dt.), no *G. pratincola* were spotted when I monitored *G. maldivarum* breeding colonies during the summers of 2009–2013—MVN]

Eastern Marsh Harrier *Circus spilonotus*

While boating from Gupti to Dangamal on 28 December, a harrier was seen flying cross the river. Since the bird showed an unbarred grey upper tail and whitish under parts, it was clear that the bird was an adult male harrier. Field observations showed a light barring on the under side, a noticeable barring on the upper wing (secondaries), and brownish upper wing coverts. A single image of its upper parts taken at that time also confirmed some of these key features. The combination of these features pointed to a sub-adult Eastern Marsh Harrier *Circus spilonotus*; its all white under parts, including a paler head eliminating Eurasian Marsh- *C. aeruginosus* and Pied- *C. melanoleucos* Harriers; brown upper wing coverts and dark barring on upper wing (secondaries) eliminating Pallid- *C. macrourus*, Hen- *C. cyaneus*, and Montagu's- *C. pygargus* Harriers. However, since we lack good photographs to support our sighting, this identification is treated as provisional.

[Rasmussen & Anderton (2005) consider this species hypothetical to the region, as there are no known specimens or photographs from South Asia. However, Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) include it based on records from Bangladesh (Rasmussen 2013). The species is reported quite often in Assam, and has been recently photographed in West Bengal (Das 2011). However, there are no reports from Odisha.—MVN]

Plaintive Cuckoo *Cacomantis merulinus*

While we were looking out for crakes (Rallidae) around the reeds in Mangalajodi on 22 December, few *Cacomantis* cuckoos suddenly appeared in the reeds. The first, which gave good views, was not an adult bird. Neither did it fit the field guide description of a juvenile *Cacomantis*. It showed a brown crown, a plain rufous-brown throat, slightly lighter plain under parts, unbarred upper wings & under tail coverts and barred upper tail. While we were wondering whether the bird was an immature Grey-bellied- *C. passerinus* or a Plaintive- *C. merulinus* Cuckoo, another bird, a hepatic female Plaintive Cuckoo appeared. Soon, a typical adult plumaged Plaintive Cuckoo also came into the view. Since the birds moved together, it was concluded that the first bird indeed was an immature Plaintive Cuckoo transitioning from juvenile to adult plumage. This site was re-visited on 23 December and the three birds were seen again.

[The presence of *C. merulinus* has been sporadically reported from Odisha, specifically from Mangalajodi, where Madhu, the resident bird guide, seems to have been seeing it every winter; in fact, a *Cacomantis* cuckoo, which he showed me in January 2011, in hindsight, was a sub-adult *merulinus*. An adult male, which was seen in Jenabil (21°51'N, 86°22'E) in STR, during the winter of 2006, was considered a vagrant at that time, as there were no other records. With the present reports, it appears safe to conclude that the species is a rare, but regular, winter visitor to Odisha. —MVN]

Collared Scops Owl *Otus lettia*

During the preparation for the trip, MVN had indicated that the Collared Scops Owl *Otus lettia* was regularly heard at Dangamal. Hence we prepared ourselves by familiarizing its call (XC115094 in <http://www.xeno-canto.org>). On our first night at Dangamal, we heard a possible individual, but the calls quickly died out. So, we decided to give it a try at 0400 hrs the next day. After about 30 min, the birds started calling and we could clearly hear the calls of at least three birds from various directions. Though we searched the areas from where we thought the calls were coming, we could not locate any of the calling birds, and had to be satisfied with the calls.

[I heard a 'strange' *O. bakkamoena* call during a field trip in 1996 to Dangamal. That same call was also heard during many subsequent trips, and I thought it to be a variation in the *bakkamoena* repertoire. This confusion prevailed till Pratap Singh, after analysing sonogram recordings made during his BNP visit, identified them conclusively as those of *O. lettia*. However, I have not seen anywhere else in the state. Neither Rasmussen & Anderton (2012), nor Ali & Ripley (2001) include Odisha in the range of this species and hence this information is novel. —MVN]

Mangrove Pitta *Pitta megarhyncha*

After finishing a day's birding around Gupti by 1800 hrs on 27 December, we were waiting for the boat to cross the canal. Right at the boarding point, we heard a loud four-noted call and knew immediately what it was. Though we did not really anticipate seeing one, we still had considered Mangrove Pitta *Pitta megarhyncha* as one of the rare probables in the area and hence had familiarised ourselves with its calls (XC35835 in <http://www.xeno-canto.org>). We compared the calls and they matched perfectly. At least three different birds were calling. We traced the calls of the one closest to us, and realised that it roosted just near the road. The bird called for about two–three minutes from a single perch and then stopped calling. On 28 December, we were at Dangamal again at dusk, but the single calling bird was too far and we could not reach the spot before it stopped calling. As we knew that it was roosting close to the road at Gupti, we tried again on the evening of 28 December. We reached the same spot at 1730 hrs and waited by the roadside for the calls. As on the previous occasion, the bird started calling around 1800 hrs and even though we could track the bird to the roosting tree and to a specific clump, we were unable to spot the bird, which was in all likelihood deep inside the foliage, and the visibility was very poor due to fading light.

[Rasmussen & Anderton (2005) do not list this species from India; all South Asia references being from the Bangladesh Sundarbans. However, in recent years it has been photographed from the Indian Sundarbans (Chatterjee 2010, 2013) and has been repeatedly seen by many on Bali Island, West Bengal. Though Pandav (1997) does not list this species for BNP, Gopi & Pandav (2007) include it as 'fairly common' in BNP, a fact echoed by the resident bird guide, Vijay, who stated that it was particularly easy to spot during its breeding season. Local bird guides indicate that the bird can be heard and seen in certain specific localities in BNP and indicate that it might most probably be breeding there, going by its behaviour, though no direct nesting evidence has been found till date. However, detailed observations on foraging, roosting, etc., backed by photographs, have recently been obtained from BNP by Vivek Sarkar (*pers. comm.*, June 2013). —MVN]

Small-billed Scaly Thrush *Zoothera dauma*

In Gurguria, STR (21°51'N, 86°14'E), there are three different buildings that are used to house tourists. We were initially allotted rooms in the building farthest from the entry point. As the room had an interesting mix of scrub and trees around it, VR started scanning the area to check if we could find something interesting. As soon as he stepped into the scrub, VR & VD noticed a movement, and they located a Small-billed Scaly Thrush *Zoothera dauma* on the ground, which flushed and disappeared as the rest of us closed in.

[Though it is known to winter in the northern Eastern Ghats (Rasmussen & Anderton 2005), range maps in guides (Grimmett *et al.* 2011) do not list more than a couple of records from Odisha; hence this sighting is noteworthy. However, it is a regular winter visitor to the state and occurs in all suitable biotopes. Specifically, records are from STR, Kuldiha WLS (21°23'N, 86°32'E), Badrama WLS (21°29'N, 84°17'E), Chandka WLS (21°29'N, 84°17'E), BNP, and Debrigarh WLS (21°33'N, 83°38'E). It is under-reported due to its retiring habits in dense forested habitats. —MVN]

Tickell's Thrush *Turdus unicolor*

BNP has some good patches of evergreen forest in addition to its famous mangroves. On 28 December, we took a winding route from a boat landing near Gupti, up till Dangamal, which passed through some excellent patches of evergreen forest. During this trek, we saw two thrushes at one point: an adult Orange-headed Thrush *Geokichla citrina citrina*, and a Tickell's Thrush *T. unicolor*. Both were rummaging in the leaf litter in the same area and were together at some point of time.

[Though it is known to winter in the northern Eastern Ghats (Rasmussen & Anderton 2005), the range maps in guides (Grimmett *et al.* 2011) do not show more than two records from Odisha. However, it is possibly a regular winter visitor to the state, but not reported often due to paucity of active birders visiting areas haunted by the bird. I have several personal winter sighting records from STR; an adult (possibly the same individual) used to frequent the campus of Bhanjabasa forest rest house in southern part of STR for three consecutive winters from 2006 to 2009. —MVN]

Pale-footed Bush Warbler *Urosphena pallidipes*

There are some excellent grasslands that intersperse the sal forests of STR. MVN had indicated that it could harbour interesting birds like White-tailed Stonechat *Saxicola leucurus* and Pale-footed Bush Warbler *Urosphena pallidipes*. So we decided to explore such an area near a forest watchtower inside the park. The grassland had a stream running through its centre, and as we neared the water, we heard a metallic sound from the grasses across the stream. Our initial thoughts were of a *Prinia*, but soon the repeated calls intrigued us. We crossed the stream and tried to locate the bird, which started moving through the undergrowth. At one point it came to the bushes along the edge of the water, giving better views, and revealing its identity as Pale-footed Bush Warbler. Its key features—flesh-coloured legs, whitish under parts with buffy flanks, face pattern with clear dark eye line and prominent eye-brow, and relatively short tail—were noted while it kept moving along the stream.

[The only published record of *U. pallidipes*, from peninsular India, is of an April specimen from Sankrametta (c. 1000 above msl), northern Eastern Ghats, Andhra Pradesh (Ali & Ripley 2001).



19 . A pair of Ruby-cheeked Sunbirds from Barbara forests

Being very familiar with its distinctive calls from the sal forests of Dehradun, (Uttarakhand) I was pleasantly surprised to hear it in STR during the monsoons of 2007. Subsequently, it was found to be a resident in the park, and probably breeding, though a nest is yet to be found. A detailed note of its specific occurrence, altitudinal zone, habitat preferences, vocalisation, and behaviour is currently under preparation. —MVN]

Ruby-cheeked Sunbird *Chalcoparia singalensis*

While birding in the Barbara forests (19°51'N, 85°02'E) of the Khurda forest division, we noticed a female sunbird that looked different due to its short beak, and the light orange wash on its throat [19]. While noting down more of its details, we noticed two other birds, one of which was immediately identified as a male Ruby-cheeked Sunbird *Chalcoparia singalensis* as it showed the distinctive shiny greenish cap, bronzy cheeks, and orange throat. The third bird was identified as a juvenile; it was similar to the female, but duller in appearance, and lacking the orange wash.

[Ruby-cheeked Sunbird is mainly found in the Himalayan foothills, with a range that extends eastward to the southern Assam hills (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). There are two reports of its occurrence in northern Andhra Pradesh (Ripley *et al.* 1988; Ramesh & Nandakumar 2012), and hence it is expected to occur in the adjoining Eastern Ghats of Odisha. Though there are no published reports from Odisha, it has been recently reported from the Barbara forests, and the forests of the Phulbani- and Raygada- districts of southern Odisha (Vivek Sarkar *pers. comm.* June 2013). Hence, it has possibly been overlooked and might have a sparse presence throughout the suitable habitats in the state. —MVN]

Table 1: List of threatened species recorded during the trip

Species	STATUS	CHI	BNP
Painted Stork <i>Mycteria leucocephala</i>	NT	✓	✓
Black-necked Stork <i>Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus</i>	NT	✓	
Lesser Adjutant <i>Leptoptilos javanicus</i>	VU		✓
Black-headed Ibis <i>Threskiornis melanocephalus</i>	NT	✓	✓
Spot-billed Pelican <i>Pelecanus philippensis</i>	NT	✓	
Oriental Darter <i>Anhinga melanogaster</i>	NT	✓	✓
Pallas's Fish Eagle <i>Haliaeetus leucorhynchus</i>	VU	✓	
Greater Spotted Eagle <i>Aquila clanga</i>	VU		✓
Black-tailed Godwit <i>Limosa limosa</i>	NT	✓	✓
Eurasian Curlew <i>Numenius arquata</i>	NT	✓	✓
River Tern <i>Sterna aurantia</i>	NT	✓	
Brown-winged Kingfisher <i>Pelargopsis amauroptera</i>	NT		✓
Mangrove Pitta <i>Pitta megarhyncha</i>	NT		✓

Other significant sightings

Ten Near-threatened (NT) and three Vulnerable (VU) species, as classified by IUCN (BirdLife International 2012), were recorded during the trip (Table 1). Interestingly, all of them were wetland, or wetland dependent species, and were recorded from Chilika (CHI) or BNP.

Some of the spectacular moments of the trip included the boat trips in Bhitarkanika that produced multiple sightings of the three mangrove-dependent kingfishers (Black-capped *Halcyon pileata*, Collared *Todirhamphus chloris* & Brown-winged), simultaneous sightings of nine Short-toed Eagles *Circaetus gallicus* in different parts of the sky and perched on trees from a grassland in BNP, a confiding Pallas Fish-eagle that allowed us to get close to it while it perched on the poles that demarcate Nalaban Bird Sanctuary in Chilika lake, and huge concentrations, nearly 3000–5000 strong, of Black-tailed Godwits that we watched at eye-level during the boat ride at Mangalajodi. Also recorded were flocks of Fulvous Whistling Ducks *Dendrocygna bicolor* at Mangalajodi, nearly a thousand Greater Flamingos *Phoenicopterus roseus*, and a radio-tagged Bar-headed Goose *A. indicus* at Nalaban Island (Chilika), Pale-chinned Blue Flycatcher *Cyornis poliogenys* at Barbara forests and STR, Greater Yellownape *Chrysophlegma flavinucha*, Lineated Barbet *Megalaima lineata*, Malabar Trogon *Harpactes fasciatus*, and Siberian Rubythroat *Luscinia calliope* at STR, Chestnut-capped Babbler *Timalia pileata*, Yellow-bellied Prinia *Prinia flaviventris*, Large Hawk-Cuckoo *Hierococcyx sparverioides*, a juvenile Pied Harrier *Circus melanoleucos*, Large-tailed Nightjar *Caprimulgus macrurus*, a pair of Red-necked Falcons *Falco chicquera*, Loten's Sunbird *Cinnyris lotenius*, and an intergrade of White-throated Fantail *Rhipidura albicollis* and Spot-breasted Fantail *R. albobularis* at BNP.

Though the endemic bird concentration is low, Odisha attracts huge numbers of Palearctic migrants and hence it would be interesting to search for regional rarities during the migration. Mangroves in BNP are the only area in India, apart from the Sundarbans, where Mangrove Pitta and Brown-winged Kingfisher are found. Eastern Ghats in Odisha provide interesting variation in peninsular avifauna with several species from north-eastern India, like Pale-capped Pigeon *Columba punicea* and Ruby-cheeked Sunbird, being found here. Hence, it is an ideal birding package for local and visiting birders to spend a couple of weeks.

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On the vagrancy of the Himalayan Vulture *Gyps himalayensis* to southern India

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Himalayan Vulture *Gyps himalayensis* is considered a resident of the mountains of Central Asia, the Himalayas from northern Pakistan till Bhutan, southern and eastern Tibet, and China. Post breeding, the adults remain for most of the year in the breeding grounds while juveniles wander, in winter, into the plains of South-, and Southeast- Asia (Naorji 2006; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). Though there have been instances of vagrancy in north-east and north-west India, its extent is not well-documented (Naorji 2006); it did not, definitely, include southern India (Grimmett *et al.* 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). Though the resident *Gyps* vultures are considered 'Critically Endangered,' this species is listed under 'Least Concern' as it has a wide range and its population size and population declines are well above the relevant threshold levels (BirdLife International 2013).

This note describes a series of sightings of juvenile Himalayan Vultures from four sites, in three different parts, of southern India, all within a short span of one month; two of the birds being exhausted individuals recovered by local people. Sightings are described below, chronologically.

Akamala, Wadakkanchery, Thrissur district, Kerala (10°40'N, 76°16'E)

An exhausted individual *Gyps* vulture was recovered on 24 January 2013 by local residents and handed over to Kerala Forest Department. Initial pictures were obtained by PON and later the bird was transferred to the rescue unit of Kerala Agricultural University [20]. The bird was doing well, and took the meat that was provided, showing signs of recovery. An attempt was made to release it [21, 22] on 28 January 2013, but it refused to fly. Hence, it was taken into the care of the wildlife rescue centre, Kerala State Forest Department, Kodanad (Ernakulum district), and then to Zoological Gardens, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, where it still lives.

Based on photographs, the bird appeared to be a first year



20. In captivity, Kerala.



21. An attempted release in Kerala.

Photo: Abirith Binoy



22. An attempted release in Kerala.

juvenile Himalayan Vulture. The base colour of its body and wings was overall dark brown, lacking contrast between the coverts and flight feathers, thus eliminating Indian- *G. indicus* and Griffon- *G. fulvus* Vultures. Its legs were pale (fleshy/pinkish) compared to the grey of a Griffon Vulture. There was no rufous tinge on the upper and under wing coverts; the patagial bar was indistinct, while the white central bar was also not obvious. Upper wing coverts were well streaked (versus unmarked/lightly marked in Griffon), and some greater coverts showed pale tips. Its ventral side was uniformly dark showing prominent pale streaks that are distinctive for a Himalayan Vulture (Alström 1997).

The photographs were circulated to raptor experts, including Rishad Naoraji, and Vibhu Prakash, who concurred with the identification

Ramadevarabetta Vulture Sanctuary, Bangalore, Karnataka (12°45'N, 77°18'E)

While on a birding trip to check the Indian Vultures of Ramadevarabetta Vulture Sanctuary on 10 February 2013, PJ, DK, SS & IT saw one larger vulture sitting on the ledge [23] along with the Indian Vultures at 0710 hrs. Incidentally, CR & RP were also present at the same place, independently, documenting the vultures [24]. The birds took wing at 0900 hrs after being disturbed by some village boys, and SS shot several photographs of them in flight [25, 26]. Back from the field, the teams touched base over Facebook and compared the pictures to conclude identifications. The plumage details of the bird from Kerala were fresh in our minds and hence there was little difficulty in concluding this as a juvenile Himalayan Vulture—this time in direct comparison with adult Indian Vultures both while sitting and in flight. The overall dark vulture was noticeably bigger than the adjacent Indian Vultures and showed prominent pale streaking on the coverts and pale legs. The base colour of its upper-wing was dark brown without much contrast between the coverts and flight feathers—visible both, while sitting, and in flight. The dark under side with prominent pale streaks and indistinct patagial bar were also evident in the flight pictures. Identification was also confirmed from photographs by Vibhu Prakash. Apparently, the vulture has not been seen since then despite a few birdwatchers



Photo: Sachin Shurpali

23. Perched on a ledge, Ramadevarabetta.



Photo: Chaitra/Rajesh

24. Perched on a ledge, Ramadevarabetta.



Photo: Sachin Shurpali

25. In flight, Ramadevarabetta.

Photo: Sachin Shurpali



26. With adult Indian Vulture (lower), Ramadevarabetta.

having visited the spot (Anush Shetty *pers. comm.*, Vignesh Menon *pers. comm.*, both February 2013).

Hesserghatta Grasslands, Bangalore, Karnataka (13°09' N, 77°29'E)

While discussing the Ramadevarabetta sighting with BB, that same evening, he informed PJ that he too had photographed a *Gyps* vulture, on the same day, at Hesserghatta, which is c. 40 km north-west of Ramadevarabetta. His time of sighting, which was 11 minutes after the birds took off from Ramadevarabetta, makes it unlikely that it is the same bird. However, the two photographs indicate an overall dark bird with prominent pale streaks on the dark ventral side. The white central bar and indistinct patagial bar were also visible in the photograph [27] and one of the photographs also included a Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* for size comparison [28]. Hesserghatta is regularly frequented by several bird photographers for the last five years, most of them focussing on raptors, but this is the first time that a

Photo: Binu Balakrishnan



27. In flight, Hesserghatta.

Photo: Binu Balakrishnan



28. With Western Marsh Harrier, Hesserghatta.

Gyps vulture has been reported from there, despite the breeding colony of Indian Vultures being just 40 km away. Nobody else has reported any *Gyps* vultures since then from Hesserghatta.

Gorasa, Kakinada, East Godavari district, Andhra Pradesh (17°04'N, 82°16'E)

Resident villagers captured an exhausted vulture on 12 February 2013 at Gorasa village. Several photographs of this bird were taken on the same night by KMR at the Kakinada DFO's office, and by Dr. Selvam the next day [29, 30]. The bird was dark overall, with a distinctly streaked mantle and upper wing coverts, and with no tinge of rufous; it had pale legs. The plumage was distinctively of a juvenile Himalayan Vulture, and was quite similar to that of the other birds recorded above.

The vulture was later sent to Visakhapatnam Zoo, where it died on the fourth day. According to the FRO Kakinada, a post-mortem revealed that it had an internal injury in its throat, and was unable to feed. It is suspected that villagers had pelted it with stones prior to capturing it.



29. In captivity, Andhra Pradesh.



30. In captivity, Andhra Pradesh.

Photos: Dr. Selvam

Discussion

When the sightings were reported, it appeared that these were the first sightings of Himalayan Vulture from southern India. However, we found a photograph taken in March 2010 at Masinagudi, Tamil Nadu, and labelled "Indian Vulture," that preceded our observations (Vasanthan 2010). More pictures of this bird were obtained and examined by PJ & DK. This bird also showed various features of a juvenile Himalayan Vulture's plumage, and hence was re-identified as that. In a separate discussion, Vibhu Prakash indicated to CR that he has observed juveniles of this species in Rollappadu, Andhra Pradesh, apart from Gujarat and Maharashtra (Vibhu Prakash *pers. comm.*). In other words, it appears that each of the southern states of Kerala (Sashikumar *et al.* 2010; Sashikumar *et al.* 2011), Karnataka (Praveen 2010), Tamil Nadu, and Andhra Pradesh (Pittie 2010) has a species addition to the state checklists as depicted in the maps (Fig. 12).

Vultures do not breed in the first three years of their lifespan, hence juveniles do not stick to their breeding grounds, wandering considerably, and there is evidence of this in other vulture species like Egyptian Vultures *Neophron percnopterus* (Duriez *et al.* 2011), and Griffon Vultures *G. fulvus* (Meyburg *et al.* 2004). Juveniles of Himalayan Vulture are known to wander extensively in Southeast Asia also with sightings from the plains of Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Peninsular Malaysia, and even from Singapore and Indonesia (Ding Li & Kasornkorkbua 2008). However, they consider this as a recent change as the species is considered fairly distinct in Southeast Asia. While this is debatable, this is definitely not the case with India as there are three other *Gyps* species to be considered, and given the diverse responses our photographs evoked among birders is ample proof that it might have been overlooked in the past. However, it is quite inexplicable as to why four such birds suddenly appeared in different parts of southern India. Incidentally, the first record of a Himalayan Vulture from the United Arab Emirates was a juvenile, recorded in October 2012 (Mike Prince *pers. comm.*, both February 2013).

Reasons that have been considered for such long-distance dispersals are a decline of food supply in their regular breeding range in the Himalayas coupled with the lack of foraging and navigational experience in the immature birds, making a case for long distance vagrancy (Ding Li & Kasornkorkbua 2008). This also brings in an additional conservation concern that though Himalayan Vulture was not considered declining like other *Gyps* due to the threat from the drug, Diclofenac, the risk of juveniles getting infected while feeding on carcasses in peninsular India is very high. Most juveniles succumb to the difficult conditions that arise from inexperience in foraging of food, and from getting separated from their base populations, which are potential threats to their long-term survival.

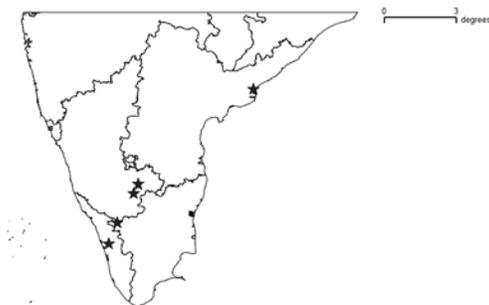


Fig 12 Himalayan Vulture records from South India.

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Taking Care of Exhausted Vultures

The juveniles of many large raptors wander a lot and are not good at finding food. Once exhausted they are unable to fly. It is good that such birds are rescued. Birds will be able to fly after they get food and water and a little care for a few days. It will take about fifteen days for such birds to recover fully. Birds should be given about 500 gm of goat meat with bones daily. Ideally half of it should be chopped meat and other half should be a piece of leg with muscles and bones as birds will pull meat from the leg and will be good for their neck and legs. Avoid giving beef or buffalo meat because of the problem of the contamination of the drug *diclofenac*. The drug has been found extremely toxic to *Gyps* vultures. Poultry meat should be strictly avoided because of disease issues. The bird should be kept in a cage not less than 10'x10'x10' and it should be in the open. At least a fourth of the cage should be shaded with a non-conducting material. The floor should be of soil only. There should be a stump and probably two perches. The perches should have rough surface or coconut rope should be wound around it. One could be at a height of about 5'. There should be a water trough and should be always filled up. The juvenile birds tend to get friendly with humans and that should be avoided otherwise there will be a problem in releasing them. The left over bones could be removed twice a week but water should be changed every alternate days.

– Vibhu Prakash, *Bombay Natural History Society*



Sighting of the Blue-winged Pitta *Pitta moluccensis* on Narcondam Island, India

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Manchi, S. S., & Kumar, J. S., 2014. Sighting of the Blue-winged Pitta *Pitta moluccensis* on Narcondam Island, India. *Indian BIRDS* 9 (1): 23–24.

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There are four species of pittas (Family: Pittidae) that are closely related and share buff-coloured under parts and conspicuous blue wing patches, namely, Indian Pitta *Pitta brachyura*, Fairy Pitta *P. nympha*, Blue-winged Pitta *P. moluccensis*, and Mangrove Pitta *P. megarhyncha*.

The known distribution of the Blue-winged Pitta is from southern and eastern Myanmar (south to Tenasserim) and southern China (south Yunnan) through Thailand (except central and most of east), Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam (Annam, Cochinchina), to north Peninsular Malaysia (Langkawi Island, Perils). The species is also known to be a migrant to Sumatra and Borneo but its breeding status there is not confirmed. Apart from this, there are also vagrant records from many areas (Smith *et al.* 1943; del Hoyo *et al.* 2003; Lambert 1996). However, there are no records of this species from South Asia (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012; Grimmett *et al.* 2011).

This note describes the sightings of Blue-winged Pitta from Narcondam Island (13°27'N, 94°17'E), a part of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands archipelago, located in the Bay of Bengal. Narcondam is a tiny, 6.89 km² island that lies c. 500 km off the Mergui Archipelago and c. 300 km south-west of the Gulf of Martaban in Myanmar (Fig. 1) (Pal *et al.* 2007).

Blue-winged Pitta was sighted at three different locations on Narcondam Island. On 25 April 2013 one bird was seen c. 146 m above msl on the island at 13°27'N, 94°16'E. A second bird was sighted on 06 May 2013 near the eastern coast at c. 12 m above msl; the very next day, a third bird was seen close to the kitchen waste outlet of the police look-out post, at c. 4 m

above msl, on the island. The first two sightings were fleeting, just enough to note down the morphological characters of the individuals. But, the third individual was seen every day at the same place for almost a week. This bird fed behind the kitchen, most probably on the insects attracted by the kitchen waste. This provided enough time to have a closer, and also photograph [31, 32, 33] it for further identification.

The Blue-winged Pitta is most likely to be confused with a Mangrove Pitta. However, the bird in the pictures does not appear to have the robust and large bill of the latter. All the pictures show buffy-brown lateral coronal bands that contrast strongly with the rest of the crown. They also show a lot more black in the medial crown stripe than shown by a typical Mangrove. The black (v white) chin, considered diagnostic for Blue-winged Pitta, is visible in [31] (Lambert 1996; del Hoyo *et al.* 2003; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). Other than Blue-winged Pitta, Hooded Pitta *P. sordida* (Raman *et al.* 2013) is the only other pitta species known from the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, and that was also sighted on Narcondam Island (Raman *et al.* 2013).

Though the Mangrove Pitta, formerly a subspecies of the Blue-winged, also known as the Large Blue-winged Pitta *P. moluccensis megarhyncha*, has been known to occur in eastern India (Whistler 1934; Paynter 1970; Abdulali 1976), the nominate race, now a full species, has not been reported from South Asia (Ali & Ripley 1987, Grimmett *et al.* 2011, Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). Though Hume (1874) reported sighting *Brachyurus [=Pitta] moluccensis* during his trip to Great Nicobar, he failed to collect a specimen and hence was not certain whether it was indeed that species. Hence, this must be the first authentic sighting of the species, supported with photographic evidence, for South Asia.

As members of the Pittidae are known to be territorial, it will not be irrational to presume that the birds located in different parts of Narcondam Island are separate individuals. Since the birds were sighted towards the end of April, and their breeding period is between April and August, and one of the individuals was seen collecting the fibres of coconut husk [33], we wonder whether it is breeding on Narcondam Island (Lambert 1996). Multiple sightings of this territorial species during this season signify that it might not be a vagrant to this island. This probable breeding visitor was perhaps not sighted earlier as all the documented visits to the island, except Sankaran (2002), were between October and April (Raman *et al.* 2013). All of the sightings of different pittas documented from the Andaman and Nicobar group of islands (Hume 1874; Raman *et al.* 2013; present) have also been close to the commencement of their breeding season. This leaves us with the presumption that pittas may be breeding

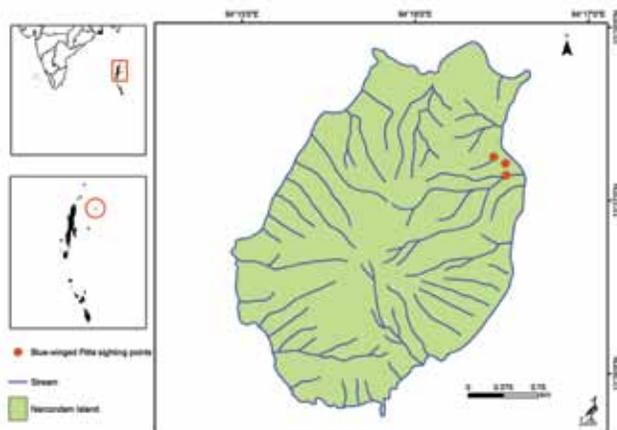


Fig. 1. Sighting locations of Blue-winged Pitta on Narcondam Island



31. Blue-winged Pitta near police lookout post at Narcondam Island



33. Blue-winged Pitta on Narcondam Island, carrying fibre from husk of coconut as nest material



32. Blue-winged Pitta searching for food near kitchen waste outlet behind kitchen at police lookout post on Narcondam Island.

visitors to the Andaman and Nicobar islands. Further studies need to be conducted to investigate status of Blue-winged Pitta on Narcondam Island and elsewhere in Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

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First photographic record of Asian Stubtail *Urosphena squameiceps* from the Indian Subcontinent

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The Asian Stubtail *Urosphena squameiceps* is short-tailed, long-legged, chunky warbler that breeds in the warm temporal regions of the eastern Palearctic in north-eastern Asia, Korea, and Japan, and winters mainly in Southeast Asia including Thailand, Myanmar, and Indochina (Kennerley & Pearson 2010; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). The species is considered a winter vagrant to Bangladesh and Nepal (Grimmett *et al.* 1998; Siddiqui *et al.* 2008). Previous sight records from the Indian Subcontinent include one from south-eastern Nepal in 1993 (Lewis 1994), and two from north-eastern Bangladesh in January 1997, and December 1999 (Thompson & Johnson 2003). Rasmussen & Anderton 2012 treated these three records as unconfirmed, and the presence of the Asian Stubtail in the region as hypothetical, considering one record from Nepal as non-definitive and two records (with tape-recording) from Bangladesh as uncorroborated. However, the records from Bangladesh are less likely to have been misidentified given the distinctiveness of the bird, the audio recordings, and the given experience of the observers.

The first photograph of the Asian Stubtail, as evidence of its occurrence in the Indian Subcontinent, was taken in Bangladesh on 2 January 2011. The bird was observed at 1700 hrs for an



34. Asian Stubtail *Urosphena squameiceps*.



36. Asian Stubtail *Urosphena squameiceps*.



35. Asian Stubtail *Urosphena squameiceps*.

hour: feeding, bathing, and preening in a wet area of a moderately dry (c. 12 m wide, c. 30 m from the waterfall) stream, which originated from a c. 50 m high waterfall known as Madhobkunda Waterfall (24°38'N, 92°13'E), Barlekha, Moulvi Bazar, Bangladesh. The bird was identified as an Asian Stubtail based on very short tail, relatively longer bill, indistinctive scales on cheek, long and prominent yellowish supercilium and black eye-stripe, white under parts, and very pale legs and feet [34, 35, 36].

This is possibly the first photographic record and further confirmation of its vagrancy in Bangladesh and in the Indian Subcontinent is likely. Several visits were made to the waterfall during the winters of 2012 and 2013, by the author and others, but no confirmed sighting was recorded since then.

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Asian Stubtail *Urosphena squameiceps* in Rabindrasarobar, Kolkata: A first record for India

Sandip Das

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Asian Stubtail *Urosphena squameiceps* is a small, short-tailed, Old World warbler that breeds in north-eastern Asia and winters from southern China to northern Southeast Asia, including the south Chin Hills and western Myanmar (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). Though it has been recorded from Nepal and Bangladesh, it is still considered 'hypothetical' in South Asia as published details are not considered definite.

On 03 November 2013, I went to Rabindrasarobar, Kolkata (22°30'N, 88°21'E) for birding with two of my friends. It is a well-wooded area with some undergrowth. The morning was sunny with clear skies. After birding, I had put my camera back in its case by 1300 hrs, when I noticed a movement amongst the dry leaves on the ground near the safari park. A tiny warbler was moving on the ground like a thrush and catching small spiders and insects. It was moving beside two Orange-headed Thrushes

Geocichla citrina and a Forest Wagtail *Dendronanthus indicus*. It would fly close to the ground for a short distance (3–4 m) when disturbed. After spending more than 30 minutes watching and photographing the bird, I left the place.

The bird is distinctive enough to be identified as an Asian Stubtail as there is no other warbler that feeds on the ground and has a very short tail. The long supercilium, black eye-stripe, rather pale and long legs, and longish dark beak were all visible in the photographs [37, 38]. Back from the field, I sent the photographs to Sumit K. Sen of *Kolkata Birds* and he circulated them to warbler experts, including Peter Kennerley and Philip D. Round; all confirming it as this species.

This appears to be the first record from India and probably the second photographic record from the Indian Subcontinent; Table 1 lists the known records from the Indian Subcontinent.



37. caption to follow



38. caption to follow

Date	Location	Coordinates	Reference
21 January 1993	Dharan forest, north of Itahari, eastern Nepal	26°46'N, 87°17'E	Lewis 1994
16 January 1997	Lawachara forest, Bangladesh	24°20'N, 91°47'E	Thompson & Johnson 2003
18 December 1999	Lawachara forest, Bangladesh	24°20'N, 91°47'E	Thompson & Johnson 2003
02 January 2011	Madhokunda Waterfall, Barlekha, Moulvi Bazar, Bangladesh	24°38'N, 92°13'E	Chowdhury 2013; see elsewhere in this issue
03 November 2013	Rabindrasarobar, Kolkata, West Bengal, India	22°30'N, 88°21'E	Das 2013; this record

It has been recently photographed from Bangladesh in January 2011 (Chowdhury 2013; see elsewhere in this issue). These photographic records should remove any doubt of its occurrence in the region.

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Letter to the Editor

A study of Crossbills (*Ixia curvirostra*) in the Himalaya: An appeal for information

There is some evidence to indicate that there may be at least two distinct varieties of crossbills in the Himalaya, one associated with Himalayan hemlocks *Tsuga dumosa* and other with Chinese larch *Larix potaninii* (Edelaar, P., 2008, *Ibis* 150: 405–408; see also Kannan's review of the paper in *Indian BIRDS* 4 (1): 35–36, 2008). We plan to make a formal study to investigate this as part of Anant Deshwal's Ph.D. programme at the University of Arkansas. We wish to study song dialects and habitat associations, and, if possible, morphometric measurements, in the various crossbill populations. We want to compare these data between populations associated with various conifers. We plan to include areas with only Hemlocks, areas with only Larches, and areas where both the conifers overlap in distribution. This is an appeal for information.

Anyone who has encountered crossbills in the Himalaya is encouraged to contact Anant Deshwal with information regarding

numbers, dialects, dates, altitude, conifers in the area, and any other pertinent information. This information will be invaluable in the planning of the study. Since the birds seem to be present exclusively in high altitude regions (2500–4000 m) they seem to be missed by most casual birders. It is important for us to know where they occur and in what numbers to plan field sites and other logistics. All information will be gratefully acknowledged.

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Snapshot sightings

Common Ringed Plover from Pong Lake, Himachal Pradesh

C. Abhinav



A Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula* in breeding plumage was photographed [39] on 5 May 2013 at Pong Lake (32°03' N, 76°06'E), Himachal Pradesh. There are two undated records from the same site during 1997–2003 (den Besten 2004), and it has been recorded infrequently in Pong since then (Dhadwal 2011). Considered a passage migrant to north-western India (Rasmussen & Anderton 2005), photographic records of this species are very few from these parts. However, it is likely that it is more regular and apparently overlooked.

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Red-backed Shrike from Jaisalmar, Rajasthan



Jainy Kuriakose

A Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio* was photographed [40] on 10 September 2013 at Ramgarh (27°22'N, 70°29'E), c. 50 km from Jaisalmer, western Rajasthan. Though it is considered a regular passage migrant through Gujarat, (Rasmussen & Anderton 2005), confirmed records from Rajasthan are very few. It has been recorded twice from the Thar Desert (Sangha 2002), while there is a recent photograph from the Jaipur area, taken in December 2005 (Singh 2005).

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Roseate Tern off Nileshwaram, Kerala

Dipu Karuthedathu & A. K. Raju

On 22 September 2013, a Roseate Tern *Sterna dougallii* in breeding plumage was photographed [41] c. 1 km off-shore (12°14'N, 76°06'E) from Thaikadappuram, Neeleshwaram,

Kerala. The bird had pale upper parts, long pale tail streamers, entirely pale wing lacking dark trailing edge and tips, and long bright red bill and legs. Photographs indicate that there were at least three more Roseates in the same flock. This is the first record of this species for Kerala (Sashikumar *et al.* 2011). They are known to breed on the Vengurla Rocks, off southern Maharashtra and those birds also show fully red bills in breeding plumage (Lainer 2004).



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Rusty-tailed Flycatcher from Morbi, Gujarat

Prasad Ganpule

A Rusty-tailed Flycatcher *Muscicapa ruficauda*, was photographed [42] in Morbi (22°49'N, 70°50'E), Gujarat on 28 September 2013. Probably on passage, it was around for two days, and the distinctive "pfeu Pfeu Pfeu" call was noted. It was probably a first winter bird as it showed a prominent white greater covert bar. There is only a single isolated record shown in Grimmett *et al.* (2011) for Gujarat. A Brown-breasted Flycatcher *M. muttui*, another rare passage migrant to Gujarat, was also photographed during the same period.



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“AMATEUR NATURALIST TRAINING (ANT)” PROGRAMME FOR FOREST RANGERS

WWF-India’s Andhra Pradesh State Office (APSO) conducted a two day “Amateur Naturalist Training (ANT)” Programme for 90 newly-recruited forest rangers from States of Goa and Andhra Pradesh in the Andhra Pradesh Forest Department Academy [AFDA], Dulapally on 6–7 September, 2013. Dr. P. Raghuveer, Director, AFDA, had invited WWF-APSO to conduct the training.

An 18-month course for the Forest Rangers offers them a variety of theoretical lessons, including field visits to the forest areas that encompassed principles of forest management. As a part of their orientation to understanding wildlife, the training programme was planned with a focus on awareness about nature, environment, wildlife, and climate and biodiversity conservation. The course included an introduction to nature & wildlife, understanding wildlife census techniques, interpretation census data, an introduction to plant world, mammals, birds and reptiles, jungle survival, stargazing at night and nature trails.

Sessions held during ANT:

- Treasure Hunt game for Flora
- Nature Trail- Campus Biodiversity Watch
- Mysterious Insect World – PowerPoint Session
- Movie Screening
- Birds and Bird Watching – PowerPoint session
- Nature Watch- A Study of Indirect and Direct Signs
- Night Trail – Herpetofauna Study
- Star-Gazing
- Bird Watching
- Wild Wisdom Quiz
- Champions of the Cause: Community and Group Understanding
- ‘U’ Present and ‘V’ Observe

The program ended with the trainees thanking the WWF staff for organising the programme, and with a few Range Officers sharing their experiences over the past two days. They asserted that while this training gave them an overview of wildlife and biodiversity conservation, it also provided them a platform to develop their skills on relaying information to others through logical debate, impassioned speech and insightful presentations. The trainees who performed their best in the two days of training were recognised and gifted WWF prizes by Dr. Raghuveer.



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