

Birding in the North Cachar Hills of Assam

Pritam Baruah

Baruah, P., 2015. Birding in the North Cachar Hills of Assam. *Indian BIRDS* 10 (2): 46–50.

Pritam Baruah, Padma Path, R.G. Baruah Road Tiniali, Guwahati 781024, Assam, India. E-mail: pritambaruah@hotmail.com.

Manuscript received on 25 May 2015.

The Barail Hill Range in the Dima Hasao District (=North Cachar Hills District) of Assam is one of the several hill ranges that make up the north-eastern hill states south of the Brahmaputra, such as Naga Hills, Patkai Hills, and Chin-Lushai Hills (Fig. 1). These ranges are sometimes grouped together in ornithological literature (Rasmussen 2012) as the 'South Assam Hills' (=hills south of the Brahmaputra: HSB). The region's avifauna was initially surveyed in the late nineteenth century by Godwin-Austen (1870a,b), Hume (1877), and Baker (1893–1901). Koelz's work (1954), in the mid-twentieth century, made the distributions of species clearer, and many new sub-species came to light (Choudhury 2000; Rasmussen 2012). Modern birdwatching started in the Barails, particularly hills south of Jatinga village, in the mid-1980s, but insurgency in the state of Assam prevented it from becoming mainstream. In fact, problems

of safety, and inaccessibility have largely prevented birdwatching in this ornithological hotspot for the last fifteen years.

I had always wanted to go birding there, but never did because of these issues. However, the 08 March 2015 pan-India event, Big Bird Day 2015 (BBD), a citizen science effort with the goal to record as many species as possible in a specific area within a day, became the perfect excuse to reconsider my apprehensions. So on a last minute whim that is where I decided to go, with no prior planning to boot.

The Barail Range is considered by BirdLife International to be an Important Bird Area (IBA-IN367) (Islam & Rahmani 2004). It is the highest range in Assam (100–1,960 m asl). Above 1,000 m the range is cloaked in evergreen forest, with oak forest along the ridge line. Below 1000 m is semi-evergreen forest with plenty of bamboo, as well as patches of natural grasses,

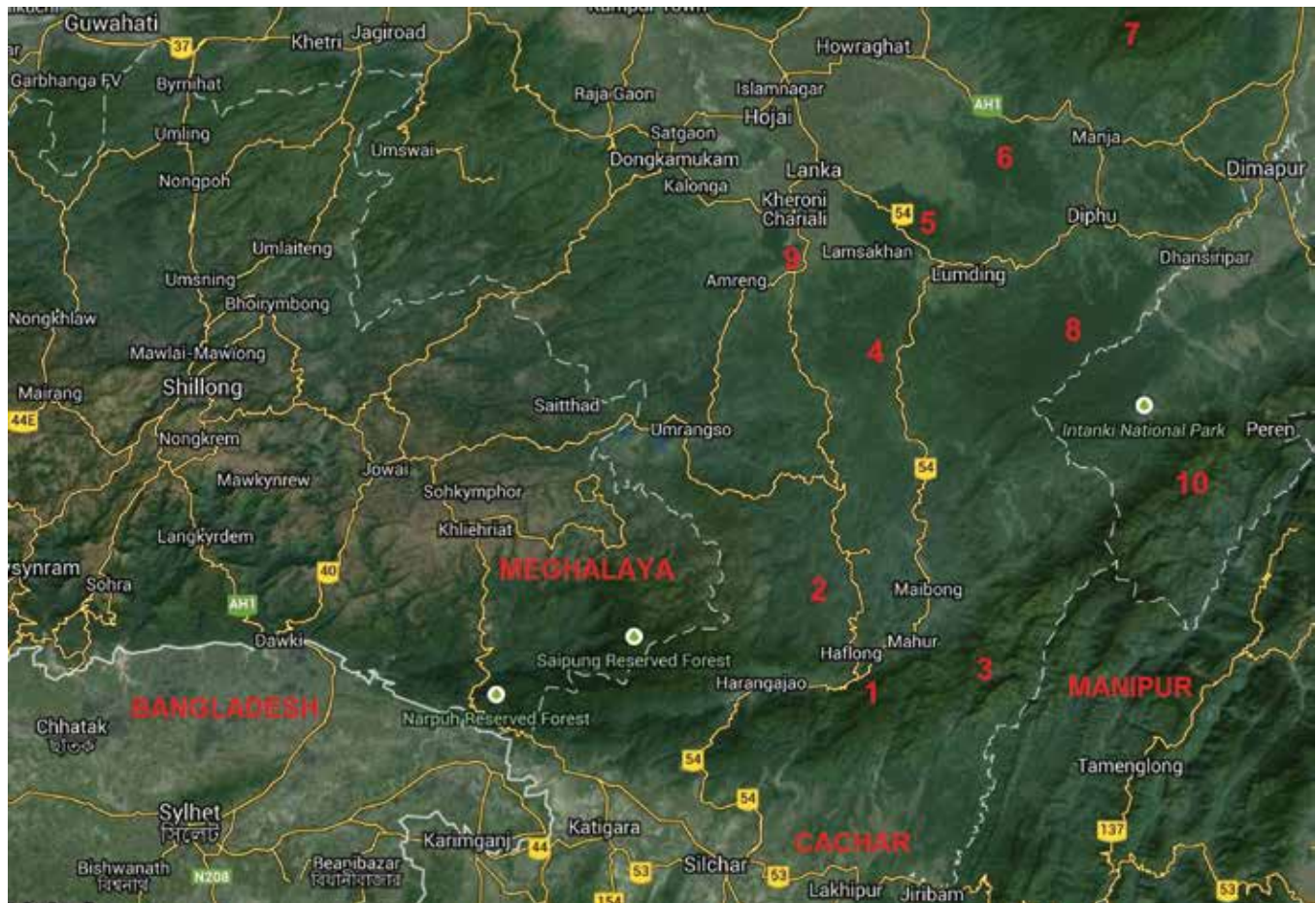


Fig. 1. Map of the region, covering an area of c. 226 x 155 km. Source: Google, AutoNavi.

1. Haflong–Jatinga–Hempeupet area (Fig. 2); 2. Dry forest and jhum in undulating terrain; 3. Barail Range (S Assam, SW Nagaland, NW Manipur); 4. Langting-Mupa Reserved Forest; 5. Lumding Reserved Forest; 6. Marat-Longri Wildlife Sanctuary; 7. Karbi Anglong Hills; 8. Dhansiri Reserved Forest; 9. Dayangmukh; 10. Nagaland State

orchards (orange, pineapple, banana, and coffee), and jhum (forests cleared in patches for shifting cultivation, and patches where natural vegetation is re-growing). The northern face of the range rises abruptly from undulating terrain, which tops up at about 700 m asl (at Haflong). This undulating terrain, all in the Dima Hasao District, is very dry because it falls in the rain shadow area of the monsoons. Most of it is covered by jhum cultivation or regenerating jhum fields. I didn't bird there as I didn't have time, but focused on the Barail Range, where higher elevations are accessible.



Fig. 2. Map of the Haflong-Jatinga-Hempeupet area, covering an area of 10.5 x 8.7 km. Source: Google, AutoNavi.

The Jatinga-Haflong settlement offers the best point of access to the Barail Range in Assam (Fig. 2). I used a car to drive to Haflong, where I stayed for two nights. I didn't birdwatch in the dry habitat along the way, due to lack of time, but it could be interesting to explore: I found some Spot-winged Starlings *Saroglossa spilopterus* at a brief stop. Once there, I started looking for good habitat, and it appeared that the northern slope of the Barail Range was covered in good forest, except at its base (700 m asl) near Jatinga. Even the Hempeupet Peak (25.106°N, 93.063°E; 1,750 m asl), tallest in the region, was covered in forest. But it was rather difficult finding how to access it, and it took me the entire second half of 07 March to confirm a reasonable plan for the BBD next day. Basically, my intention was to hike up the range, but on asking around how I should go about it, I received bizarre statements such as, 'no use going up there because no birds', 'we can only walk up at night, light a bonfire and return in the morning', 'best to go half way up, have a picnic and return', 'no going up on Sunday because everyone goes to church', and, most interestingly, 'no birds here at all except in September/October'. This last bit of gratuitous wisdom, no doubt, related to the practice of killing, and consuming exhausted passage migrants in September/October by disorienting them with bright lights on foggy and windy nights. Unfortunately, this practice is widely popular as the 'mysterious bird suicide of Jatinga', an ironic description indeed. It has since been discredited (Choudhury 2000), but the legend continues, as does the hunting. It has shown some decline, but it is unclear if that is attributable to increased awareness about conservation, or simply a decrease in the

volume of migrating birds.

Towards late evening I learnt that a trail to the very top of Hempeupet starts at Leikul, a village of the Kuki tribe, situated 2.5 km east of Jatinga. So I went there hoping to find someone to show me the way up the next morning. Almost immediately, I found a young man named Lena who volunteered to accompany me, and unlike others, did not make suggestions. Instead, he listened, and told me that he would simply accompany me; I could do what I wanted, and come down at any time I wanted to. That was a relief, and I asked him to be ready at 0600 hrs the next day. A little earlier I had scoped out the habitat along the road from Jatinga to Retzawl, but decided to exclude it from the BBD on 08 March, and instead spend some time there on the morning of 09 March, before heading back to Guwahati. So the confirmed plan for BBD was a full day birding hike, from Leikul village (700 m asl), on the trail leading up to the Hempeupet peak (1,750 m asl). Hempeupet, also called Barail Peak, is the third-highest in Assam, after Laike (1,959 m asl), and Thumjang (1,866 m asl), both of which are also in the Barail range.

We started the next morning from Leikul at 0600 hrs. On our way up, the abundant Ashy Bulbul *Hemixos flavala* was easily the most vocal species. It seemed to be in view almost constantly till about 1,200 m. There were large flocks of Striated-Yuhina *Yuhina castaniceps*, and Black-chinned Yuhina *Y. nigrimenta*. We had breakfast at a small shed along the trail that seemed to function as a scenic overlook. An area of grass at 1,400 m held promise of Manipur Bush Quail *Perdica manipurensis*, and Spot-breasted Parrotbill *Paradoxornis guttaticollis* but we failed to find either. The best birds started appearing after we crossed 1,400 m, and excellent birding continued till we reached the very top of Hempeupet. Notable was a massive feeding flock of at least 16 species, just below the top, at about 1,700 m. Among a total of 95 species for the BBD, highlights included Beautiful Nuthatch *Sitta formosa*, Rufous-backed Sibia *Leioptila annectens*, Grey Sibia *Heterophasia gracilis*, Spot-breasted Laughingthrush *Garrulax merulinus*, Blue-winged Laughingthrush *Trichalopteron squamatum*, Assam Laughingthrush *T. chrysopterum*, Red-faced Liocichla *Liocichla phoenicea*, Rusty-fronted Barwing *Actinodura egertoni*, Streak-throated Barwing *A. waldeni*, Black-headed Shrike-Babbler *Pteruthius rufiventer*, Blyth's Shrike-Babbler *P. aeralatus*, Black-eared Shrike-Babbler *P. melanotis*, White-naped Yuhina *Y. bakeri*, Whiskered Yuhina *Y. flavicollis*, Coral-billed Scimitar Babbler *Pomatorhinus ferruginosus*, Streak-breasted Scimitar Babbler *P. ruficollis*, Streaked Wren Babbler *Turdinus brevicaudatus*, Flavescent Bulbul *Pycnonotus flavescentis*, Crimson-breasted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos cathpharius*, Purple Cochoa *Cochoa purpurea*, Mrs Gould's Sunbird *Aethopyga gouldiae*, Green-tailed Sunbird *A. nipalensis*, Sapphire Flycatcher *Ficedula sapphira*, Russet Bush Warbler *Locustella mandelli*, and Collared Owllet *Glucidium brodiei*. There were also many *Phylloscopus* and *Seicercus* warblers. By the time we descended to Leikul, it was 1830 hrs, so I decided to search for Hodgson's Frogmouth *Batrachostomus hodgsoni* in suitable areas near the village. But speculative playback failed to reveal its presence. Next morning, a short birding session along the Jatinga-Retzawl road, an eight kilometer stretch, yielded 37 species, among which was an Asian Stubtail *Urosphena squameiceps*, possibly a first for Assam.

I returned to Guwahati by the highway-under-construction (Haflong-Maibong-Lumding-Nagaon-Guwahati), a journey that took me five hours and forty-five minutes to complete. I

hoped to spend some time birding on the way back, and even though the road passed through good wilderness areas (dry forest in Langting-Mupa Reserved Forest, and deciduous forest in Lumding Reserved Forest), I decided against stopping because of heavy disturbance and dust from highway construction.

Although this was a very short trip, I found enough evidence that continues to justify its reputation as an area of very high bird diversity. But several factors may warrant further studies: bird distributions change; hunting has intensified due to increased human population and introduction of guns; and further studies are required to fully document the area's avifauna. I feel that the area is safe enough now to conduct such long term studies. While local people are aware that the area is famous for birds, it appears to be only in context of the inexplicably labeled 'mass bird suicides of Jatinga'. Furthermore, this awareness has not prevented hunting, as it was found, from several interactions, that bird, and mammal hunting pressures are still quite severe throughout the year, including during fall migration (August–October). There is an urgent need to spread awareness locally, about the biodiversity of the region, and its conservation. And along with the continually improving security situation, and better connectivity through new highways, this area can reclaim its status as a birding hotspot.

Notes on some selected species

Flavescent Bulbul *Pycnonotus flavescens*

Many in drier forest on the way up to Hempeupet at 1,000 m. In India, found only in HSB.

Beautiful Nuthatch *Sitta formosa*

Top bird of the trip. This bulky nuthatch is considered rare across its range (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). It was nice to confirm its continued presence in Assam, and the Barail Range. Seen at 1,450 m in a mixed flock, with Rufous-backed Sibia, Nepal Fulvetta, White-naped Yuhina, Black-chinned Yuhina, and Whiskered Yuhina.

Rufous-backed Sibia *Leioptila annectens*

Two seen in a flock, with Beautiful Nuthatch, and then many more seen in a large flock near the top of Hempeupet. It is quite uncommon across its range, and it was great to confirm its continued presence in Assam, and the Barail Range.

Grey Sibia *Heterophasia gracilis*

Surprisingly, only one individual of this range-restricted HSB-specialty was recorded. It was seen associating with a mixed bulbul party at the edge of a forest at c. 1,200 m.

Spot-breasted Laughingthrush *Garrulax merulinus*

One calling from a densely vegetated gully close to the 1,550 m mark. It was firmly unresponsive to playback. But higher up, near the top, I got lucky when, while watching a Red-faced Liocichla along a descending slope, a rampaging Blue-winged Laughingthrush suddenly appeared, and flushed one Spot-breasted Laughingthrush, and one Assam Laughingthrush; both must have been feeding on the ground out of view. In India it is found only in the HSB region.

Chestnut-crowned Laughingthrush *Trochalopteron erythrocephalum*

A few of these range-restricted HSB-specialty were seen on the ground below the Hempeupet peak. The race *godwini* found in the hills is considered part of a distinct species restricted to HSB and called Assam Laughingthrush *Trochalopteron chrysopterum* (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012).

Black-headed Shrike-Babbler *Pteruthius rufiventer*

Seen in a massive mixed flock just below the Hempeupet peak, which also contained Blyth's-, and Black-eared Shrike-Babblers.

Asian Stubtail *Urosphena squameiceps*

Good sighting of one bird that was hopping on the ground under dense roadside vegetation: very short tail, bold long black eye-stripe, long eye-brow, horizontal stance, very light buff underparts, and brown upperparts. First seen in a shallow gully parallel to the road, with little vegetation. 'Ran' to cover under vegetation above the gully almost as soon as I detected it, but continued to walk on the ground below the vegetation, in clear view, for about 20 sec. Did not fly, but hopped out of sight. This sighting is not entirely unexpected as it has been recorded several times in the past from elsewhere in the subcontinent, notably from eastern Bangladesh (1997, 1999, 2011), south-eastern Nepal (1993), and West Bengal (2013) (Lewis 1994; Das 2014). Its status in the Indian Subcontinent remains unclear, and understudied.

References

- Baker, E. C. S., 1893. The birds of North Cachar. A catalogue of the Passeriformes, Coraciiformes and the Order Psittacii of the Sub-class Ciconiiformes. *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 8 (2): 162–211.
- Baker, E. C. S., 1894a. The birds of North Cachar. Part II. *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 9 (1): 1–24.
- Baker, E. C. S., 1894b. The birds of North Cachar. Part III. *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 9 (2): 111–146.
- Baker, E. C. S., 1895. The birds of North Cachar. Part IV. *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 10 (1): 1–12.
- Baker, E. C. S., 1896a. The birds of North Cachar. Part V. *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 10 (2): 161–168.
- Baker, E. C. S., 1896b. The birds of North Cachar. Part VI. *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 10 (3): 339–371.
- Baker, E. C. S., 1897a. The birds of North Cachar. Part VII. *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 10 (4): 539–567.
- Baker, E. C. S., 1897b. The birds of North Cachar. Part VIII. *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 11 (2): 222–233.
- Baker, E. C. S., 1898. The birds of North Cachar. Part IX. *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 11 (3): 390–405.
- Baker, E. C. S., 1899. The birds of North Cachar. Part X. *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 12 (3): 486–510.
- Baker, E. C. S., 1901a. The birds of Cachar. *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 13 (3): 399–405.
- Baker, E. C. S., 1901b. The birds of Cachar. *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 13 (4): 563–570.
- Choudhury, A., 2000. *The birds of Assam*. 1st ed. Guwahati: Gibbon Books & World Wide Fund for Nature-India. Pp. 1–240.
- Das, S., 2014. Asian Stubtail *Urosphena squameiceps* in Rabindrasarobar, Kolkata: A first record for India. *Indian BIRDS* 9 (1): 26–27.
- Godwin-Austen, H. H., 1870a. A list of birds obtained in the Khasi and North Cachar Hills. *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 39 (Part II No II): 91–112.
- Godwin-Austen, H. H., 1870b. Second list of birds obtained in the Khasi and North Cachar Hill ranges, including the Garo Hills and country at their base in the Mymensing and Sylhet districts. *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 39 (Part II No III): 264–275.

Grimmett, R., Inskipp, C., & Inskipp, T., 2011. *Birds of the Indian Subcontinent*. 2nd ed. London: Oxford University Press & Christopher Helm. Pp. 1–528.

Hume, A. O., 1877. A first list of the birds of North-Eastern Cachar. *Stray Feathers* 5 (1): 1–47.

Islam, Z.-u., & Rahmani, A. R., 2004. *Important Bird Areas in India. Priority sites for conservation*. 1st ed. Mumbai: Indian Bird Conservation Network: Bombay Natural History Society and BirdLife International (UK). Pp. i–xviii, 1–1133.

Koelz, W. N., 1954. Ornithological studies I. New birds from Iran, Afghanistan, and India. *Contributions from the Institute for Regional Exploration* 1: 1–32.

Lewis, A., 1994. Asian Stubtail *Urosphena squameiceps*: a new species for Nepal and the Indian subcontinent. *Forktail* 9: 155.

Rasmussen, P. C., & Anderton, J. C., 2012. *Birds of South Asia: the Ripley guide*. 2nd ed. Washington, D.C. and Barcelona: Smithsonian Institution and Lynx Edicions. 2 vols. Pp. 1–378; 1–683.

Table 1. List of birds

Emerald Dove <i>Chalcophaps indica</i>	Common Tailorbird <i>Orthotomus sutorius</i>
Asian Palm Swift <i>Cypsiurus balasiensis</i>	Dark-necked Tailorbird <i>O. atrogularis</i>
Green-billed Malkoha <i>Phaenicophaeus tristis</i>	Russet Bush Warbler <i>Locustella mandelli</i>
Black Eagle <i>Ictinaetus malaiensis</i>	Pygmy Wren Babbler <i>Pnoepyga pusilla</i>
Collared Owlet <i>Glaucidium brodiei</i>	Striated Swallow <i>Cecropis striolata</i>
Asian Barred Owlet <i>G. cuculoides</i>	White-throated Bulbul <i>Alophoixus flaveolus</i>
White-browed Piculet <i>Sasia ochracea</i>	Ashy Bulbul <i>Hemixos flavala</i>
Speckled Piculet <i>Picumnus innominatus</i>	Mountain Bulbul <i>Ixos mccllellandii</i>
Crimson-breasted Woodpecker <i>Dendrocopos cathpharius</i>	Black Bulbul <i>Hypsipetes leucocephalus</i>
Great Barbet <i>Psilopogon virens</i>	Striated Bulbul <i>Pycnonotus striatus</i>
Lineated Barbet <i>P. lineatus</i>	Black-crested Bulbul <i>P. melanicterus</i>
Golden-throated Barbet <i>P. franklinii</i>	Red-vented Bulbul <i>P. cafer</i>
Blue-throated Barbet <i>P. asiaticus</i>	Flavescent Bulbul <i>P. flavescens</i>
Coppersmith Barbet <i>P. haemacephalus</i>	Yellow-browed Warbler <i>Abornis inornata</i>
Common Kestrel <i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	Hume's Leaf Warbler <i>A. humei</i>
Vernal Hanging Parrot <i>Loriculus vernalis</i>	Buff-barred Warbler <i>A. pulchra</i>
Short-billed Minivet <i>Pericrocotus brevirostris</i>	Dusky Warbler <i>Phylloscopus fuscatus</i>
Scarlet Minivet <i>P. flammeus</i>	White-spectacled Leaf Warbler <i>Seicercus affinis</i>
Black-winged Cuckooshrike <i>Lalage melaschistos</i>	Grey-cheeked Leaf Warbler <i>S. poliogenys</i>
Black-headed Shrike-babbler <i>Pteruthius rufiventer</i>	Whistler's Leaf Warbler <i>S. whistleri</i>
Blyth's Shrike-babbler <i>Pteruthius aeralatus</i>	Greenish Leaf Warbler <i>S. trochiloides</i>
Black-eared Shrike-babbler <i>P. melanotis</i>	Blyth's Leaf Warbler <i>S. reguloides</i>
White-bellied Erpornis <i>Erpornis zantholeuca</i>	Grey-hooded Leaf Warbler <i>S. xanthoschistos</i>
Black Drongo <i>Dicrurus macrocercus</i>	Slaty-bellied Tesia <i>Tesia olivea</i>
Bronzed Drongo <i>D. aeneus</i>	Grey-bellied Tesia <i>T. cyaniventer</i>
Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo <i>D. remifer</i>	Asian Stubtail <i>Urosphena squameiceps</i>
Hair-crested Drongo <i>D. hottentottus</i>	Mountain Tailorbird <i>Phyllergates cucullatus</i>
Greater Racket-tailed Drongo <i>D. paradiseus</i>	Striated Yuhina <i>Yuhina castaneiceps</i>
Plain Flowerpecker <i>Dicaeum concolor</i>	Black-chinned Yuhina <i>Y. nigrimenta</i>
Fire-breasted Flowerpecker <i>D. ignipectus</i>	Whiskered Yuhina <i>Y. flavicollis</i>
Little Spiderhunter <i>Arachnothera longirostra</i>	White-naped Yuhina <i>Y. bakeri</i>
Green-tailed Sunbird <i>Aethopyga nipalensis</i>	Oriental White-eye <i>Zosterops palpebrosus</i>
Mrs. Gould's Sunbird <i>A. gouldiae</i>	Coral-billed Scimitar Babbler <i>Pomatorhinus ferruginosus</i>
Orange-bellied Leafbird <i>Chloropsis hardwickii</i>	White-browed Scimitar Babbler <i>P. schisticeps</i>
House Sparrow <i>Passer domesticus</i>	Streak-breasted Scimitar Babbler <i>P. ruficollis</i>
Olive-backed Pipit <i>Anthus hodgsoni</i>	Grey-throated Babbler <i>Stachyris nigriceps</i>
White Wagtail <i>Motacilla alba</i>	Striped Tit Babbler <i>Mixornis gularis</i>
Grey-headed Canary-flycatcher <i>Culicicapa ceylonensis</i>	Golden Babbler <i>Cyanoderma chrysaeum</i>
Rufescent Prinia <i>Prinia rufescens</i>	Rufous-capped Babbler <i>C. ruficeps</i>
Grey-breasted Prinia <i>P. hodgsonii</i>	Rufous-winged Fulvetta <i>Schoeniparus castaneiceps</i>
	Puff-throated Babbler <i>Pellorneum ruficeps</i>

Streaked Wren Babbler <i>Turdinus brevicaudatus</i>
Nepal Tit Babbler <i>Alcippe nipalensis</i>
Spot-breasted Laughing-thrush <i>Garrulax merulinus</i>
White-crested Laughing-thrush <i>G. leucolophus</i>
Blue-winged Laughing-thrush <i>Trochalopteron squamatum</i>
Chestnut-crowned Laughing-thrush <i>T. erythrocephalum</i>
Grey Sibia <i>Heterophasia gracilis</i>
Silver-eared Mesia <i>Leiothrix argentauris</i>
Rufous-backed Sibia <i>Leioptila annectens</i>
Red-faced Liocichla <i>Liocichla phoenicea</i>
Streak-throated Barwing <i>Sibia waldeni</i>
Blue-winged Minla <i>Siva cyanouroptera</i>
Rusty-fronted Barwing <i>Actinodura egertoni</i>
Beautiful Nuthatch <i>Sitta formosa</i>

Chestnut-tailed Starling <i>Sturnia malabarica</i>
Common Myna <i>Acridotheres tristis</i>
Oriental Magpie Robin <i>Copsychus saularis</i>
White-rumped Shama <i>Kittacinda malabarica</i>
Pale-chinned Blue Flycatcher <i>Cyornis poliogenys</i>
Rufous-bellied Niltava <i>Niltava sundara</i>
Lesser Shortwing <i>Brachypteryx leucophris</i>
White-tailed Robin <i>Myiomela leucura</i>
Golden Bush Robin <i>Tarsiger chrysaeus</i>
Taiga Flycatcher <i>Ficedula albicilla</i>
Snowy-browed Flycatcher <i>F. hyperythra</i>
Rufous-gorgetted Flycatcher <i>F. strophitata</i>
Sapphire Flycatcher <i>F. sapphira</i>
Purple Cochoa <i>Cochoa purpurea</i>

Lesser Florican *Sypheotides indica* in Warora (Chandrapur, Maharashtra, India): Conservation requirements

Sujit S. Narwade, Vithoba Hegde, Vipin V. Fulzele, Bandu T. Lalsare & Asad R. Rahmani

Narwade, S. S., Hegde, V., Fulzele, V. V., Lalsare, B. T., & Rahmani, A. R., 2015. Lesser Florican *Sypheotides indica* in Warora (Chandrapur, Maharashtra, India): Conservation requirements. *Indian BIRDS* 10 (2): 50–52.

Sujit S. Narwade, Project Scientist, Bharat Natural History Society (BNHS-India), Hornbill House, Shaheed Bhagat Singh Road, Mumbai 400001, Maharashtra, India. E-mail: sujitsnarwade@gmail.com. [Corresponding author]

Vithoba Hegde, Senior Field Assistant, Collection Department, Bharat Natural History Society (BNHS-India), Hornbill House, Shaheed Bhagat Singh Road, Mumbai 400001, Maharashtra, India.

Vipin V. Fulzele, Warora, Chandrapur, Maharashtra, India. E-mail: vipinfulzele29@rediffmail.com.

Bandu T. Lalsare, Round Officer, Warora, Chandrapur, Maharashtra, India. E-mail: btalsare@rediffmail.com.

Asad R. Rahmani, Director, Bharat Natural History Society (BNHS-India), Hornbill House, Shaheed Bhagat Singh Road, Mumbai 400001, Maharashtra, India. E-mail: rahmani.asad@gmail.com.

Manuscript received on 06 December 2014.

The Lesser Florican *Sypheotides indica* (Otididae: Bustards) is endemic to the Indian Subcontinent. It is known for its irregular local movements in its non-breeding season (Sanakaran 1990). It was once widespread, and common, but now breeds in a few areas in Gujarat, south-eastern Rajasthan (Bhardwaj *et al.* 2011), north-western Maharashtra, and western Madhya Pradesh (Dutta *et al.* 2013). It was also once common in the Terai region of Nepal, but is now rare. India plays a major role in the protection of the 'Endangered' Lesser Florican as 90% of its global population is found in India (Sankaran *et al.* 1992). Due to the loss of its potential habitat, the mosaic of grasslands, and traditional croplands, its population is declining (BirdLife International 2014). In India, the pressure on the remaining grasslands will only increase in the future, and thus the species will struggle for its survival (Rahmani 2012).

The Lesser Florican has been recorded from Pune, and its

adjoining areas, such as the Sinhagad Hills, Mulshi Hills, and the Saswad–Dive Ghats (Mahabal & Lamba 1987; Kalpavriksh 2001). It was mentioned as 'rare' in Mumbai (Anonymous 1909). A bird was shot near Pen, in Raigad District, in November 1896 (Anonymous 1898). It was reported from Nannaj Bustard Sanctuary in Sholapur District (Islam & Rahmani 2002), and a chick was rescued in year 2006 from the Karmala area of Solapur (Rahmani *et al.* 2014). It was common in Nashik-, and Ahmednagar Districts (Hume & Marshall 1879), and sighted in the Gangapur and Hosor grasslands in Nashik District in 1998 (Pittie 1998; Raha & Prakash 2001). A female of the species was rescued by a local person in October 2002 at Ambap village, 20 km off the Pune–Bengaluru highway (Rahmani *et al.* 2014). In the Vidarbha region of Maharashtra, which is part of Central India, the Lesser Florican has been recorded from Borgao Manju, Akola, and Darwha, in Yavatmal District (Kasambe & Gahale 2010). Mr.