

buckthorn thickets, a few were present in and around settlements with small plantations. Some White-winged Redstart males appeared to be holding territories as they frequently drove off other males. Barely five to ten percent of the birds encountered by us in the valley were females. There were no birds on the Gramphu–Batal–Kaza road up to Khurik. On 23 February 2017 we drove up to Chhidang in Pin Valley but encountered only three to four birds. At both these sites there was an absence of sea buckthorn bushes. During an earlier visit in June 2009 HSS and SS did not encounter the species, as it is only a winter visitor to the valley.

While Pfister (2004) observed that throughout the year the bird was wary and shy in Ladakh, we found it quite tame in the Spiti Valley. In adjoining Ladakh (where it is a scarce breeder), the migrating birds possibly come from Tibet (Collar 2005). A 1981 study in Tikse, Ladakh, undertaken by members of the Southampton University, recorded the passage of a large number of White-winged Redstarts during November; when they ringed 941 birds, and trapped another 1543 (Beaman & Porter 1983). It is very likely that the birds we found in Spiti Valley also originated in Tibet.

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Hooded Pitta *Pitta sordida* in Kalesar National Park, Haryana, India

While birding in Kalesar National Park (30.30°–30.45°N, 77.42°–77.58°E; 180–700 m asl), in Yamuna Nagar District, Haryana, on 24 June 2017, we spotted a small, stub-tailed bird that flushed from the leaf litter collected on the edges of a fire-line between two sections of a sal *Shorea robusta* forest. The bird was subsequently spotted hiding in the scrub at the base of a small tree. While we observed, it flew and perched on a small



175. Hooded Pitta in Kalesar National Park, Haryana.



176. Hooded Pitta in Kalesar National Park, Haryana.

Pic: Rajiv S. Kalsi

branch of a short sal tree a few meters from the fire-line. We retreated and waited patiently, and after a few minutes the bird flew back on to the leaf litter on the fire-line and started foraging. A few minutes later another, similar, bird was observed flying across the fire-line. We observed the birds for about an hour and took photographs. The species was identified as the Hooded Pitta *Pitta sordida* [175, 176] as it had a dark chestnut crown on black head, green breast and flanks, black patch on belly, scarlet lower belly and vent, and glistening, bluish lesser-covert patch and upper tail-coverts. In flight, the birds showed black primaries with prominent white patches. Both the birds called repeatedly: a two-noted whistle *vieuw-vieuw* repeated three to four times at short intervals. The same pair was observed at that location for two consecutive days. We visited the same site for a further two subsequent days, but did not see, nor hear, the species—mainly due to heavy rains. On a later visit, we re-sighted it on 30 July 2017.

The distributional range of the Hooded Pitta extends from India through South-east Asia to south-central China, the Philippines, and New Guinea (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). The western races, excluding the races from New Guinea, are sometimes split as Western Hooded Pitta; to which group the Indian birds belong (Erritzoe & Kirwan 2017). In India, it has been

reported as a summer visitor from Himachal up to north-eastern India apart from an endemic population in the Nicobar Islands (Ali & Ripley 1987; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). The nearest published records, to the present sighting, are from Uttarakhand (Mohan & Chellam 1991; Mohan 1996; Singh 2000), and Himachal Pradesh (Jones 1943). This is the first reported sighting of a Hooded Pitta from Haryana.

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Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin* in Hanle, Ladakh

On a birding trip to Ladakh and Srinagar, with my family, I saw and photographed a Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin* at Loma check post (33.17°N, 78.82°E), enroute Hanle from Chusul on 04 June 2017 at 1325 hrs. The lone bird was seen in the company of Tickell's Leaf Warblers *Phylloscopus affinis* on an unidentified plant.

The driver had to stop the car at the check post for registration. We were in the car and I noticed a species of finch on the top of the office. So, I leisurely took out the camera to identify it.



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177. Garden Warbler in Hanle.

After identifying it as the Great Rosefinch *Carpodacus rubicilla*, I noticed some warblers in the trees opposite the building. All of them were Tickell's Leaf Warblers, except one, which looked quite different. I started taking photographs haphazardly [177]. But since we were in a sensitive, military area, they stopped me, and by the time I had convinced them, it had vanished from the five to ten trees present there. As a result, I got only four to five photos of the bird. I could not spot it when we returned from Hanle on 06 June 2017.

The bird in the photographs looked like a plain warbler with brown upperparts and dull white underparts as well as very short supercilium. I thought it was either a Garden- or a Barred Warbler *Sylvia nisoria* but after referring to field guides (Kazmierczak 2000; Grimmett *et al.* 2011), the Barred Warbler was eliminated as it lacks the following features that were present on the bird in the photo: stout bill, black iris, unbarred flanks and undertail, and grey-washed neck.

The Garden Warbler is commonly found in Europe and western Asia where it breeds. It spends the winter in Africa and is a vagrant on the Indian Subcontinent. The only other record from the Indian Subcontinent, prior to this, was of three juvenile birds that were trapped and ringed at Tikse, Ladakh on 26 September and 09 October 1980, and 10 September 1981 by the Southampton University Ladakh Expeditions of 1976–1982. It is suspected that the bird I photographed might have been from the eastern population, which is sometimes treated as a separate subspecies, *woodwardi*, since it breeds in eastern Europe and temperate Asia, eastwards to western Siberia, and is more likely to pass through Ladakh on passage.

I thank Abhinav Choudhary for his prompt re-confirmation, and Nitu Sethi for asking Martin to ID the bird. I also thank Krys K. for his inputs on the subspecies of the bird. I am grateful to Praveen J. for helping with the manuscript.

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An aberrant Rusty-fronted Barwing *Actinodura egertoni* from Eaglenest Wildlife Sanctuary, Arunachal Pradesh, India

At 0647 hrs on 12 May 2017, as part of a long-term project on monitoring bird population dynamics using mist netting and bird ringing, in Eaglenest Wildlife Sanctuary, we captured a Rusty-fronted Barwing *Actinodura egertoni* (27.07°N, 92.40°E; 2030 m asl). Surprisingly, this individual had a white eye ring surrounding each eye [178], unlike any Rusty-fronted Barwing we have observed, or captured, over the last seven years of bird population monitoring in the area. We had first captured, and ringed, this individual on 07 April 2012 (Bombay Natural History