

identification. She directed me to send my photos to Kryš, editor of Oriental Bird Images (OBI) website, for further confirmation. Back home, I sent the photos to Kryš, stating it as the first European Greenfinch from India. I got a reply within four hours, and he stated that the bird looked like one but he wanted higher resolution images, which I duly forwarded. Next day Kryš wrote saying the bird seemed to be a first winter female. I consented to his idea to forward the pictures to Peter Clement, the finch expert. Peter confirmed the identification and provided the additional notes below.

"...There's not much doubt that it is anything other than a 1st w [winter] female Greenfinch (European Greenfinch) with traces of juv [juvenile] plumage showing. Everything fits including the beady eyes, dark lores and the slightly greyer tones and slightly larger bill found in southern and eastern races. All other Greenfinches have bright yellow flashes in the wing, different head patterns and slightly finer or more pointed bills and none of the juv/1st w rosefinches come close.

"As the race *C.c. turkestanicus* breeds east to central and eastern Kyrgyzstan and winters south marginally into N Afghanistan it was probably only a matter of time before one made it into (or was at least found in) NW India." (Peter Clement, pers. comm., in e-mail dated September 2015).

He also speculated whether this bird was a vagrant to the area or perhaps had recently expanded its known breeding range.

Although the nearest breeding area of the species is in eastern Kyrgyzstan (950 km northward of Ladakh), that is probably an unlikely origin for this bird given the unsuitable habitat in between and the fact that all records in China, from the first in 1994 up to at least 2007, have been from due eastwards of Kyrgyzstan, in northern Xinjiang (Ma *et al.* 2000; China Ornithological Society 2004, 2006, 2007, 2008). The next nearest breeding area is in western Tajikistan (950 km north-westwards from Ladakh)

and is perhaps the likely origin of this bird, given that there are winter records from Afghanistan (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012); the nearest, to this Ladakh record, being from Kabul (800 km westwards of Ladakh) by Kaestner (2014a, b) in January 2014.

In conclusion, this appears to be the first record of this species for India, as well as for the Indian Subcontinent.

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**Editors' comment:** Based on this record, the European Greenfinch is accepted into the India Checklist.

# Mottled Wood Owl *Strix ocellata* in West Bengal

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On Sunday, 30 April 2017 we were birding in the Arabari forest range (22.69°N, 87.34°E), Paschim Medinipur District, West Bengal. At 0835 hrs we noticed a big bird flying from one tree to another. At first we thought that it was a raptor, but when we got closer to the sal tree *Shorea robusta* it was perched on, we realised that it was a big owl, with a splash of white, rufous, and brown all over its body. It was constantly peeping out from the leaves of the sal and watching us. We noticed that other birds, like Red-vented Bulbuls *Pycnonotus cafer*, Jungle

Babblers *Turdoides striata*, Black Drongos *Dicrurus macrocercus*, etc., were constantly mobbing the owl. We photographed the owl [223, 224]. There appeared to be only one individual, and it seemed to be restricting itself to this area as it was coming back to the same trees after being mobbed by the birds.

Back from the field, we looked at the images in an attempt to identify the owl. The whitish-dark brown ventral barring and the prominent white 'half-collar' on upper breast indicated that it was a Mottled Wood Owl *Strix ocellata*. When we discussed



Pics: Ayan Khanra

223. Mottled Wood Owl photographed in the Arabari forest range, Paschim Medinipur District, West Bengal

this photograph with several expert birders like Sujan Chaterjee, Kanad Baidya, and Shantanu Manna we realised that this was a very rare sighting for West Bengal. There was only one 1968 record from Durgapore (Gauntlett 1986).

The Mottled Wood Owl is a large owl that is resident in India and parts of Nepal. It is found in gardens and thin deciduous forests adjacent to dry thorn forests or farmland. Ali & Ripley (1987), and Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) include West Bengal in its range, probably based on Gauntlett (1986). Inglis (1902) reported it from Dharbhanga District, Bihar; two specimens are held in the collection of the Bombay Natural History Society (Abdulali 1972), two in the Yale Peabody Museum (YPM VZ YPM ORN 042621-22, taken on 04 August 1907), and one in the Royal Ontario Museum, from Munger, taken on 01 July 1911 (ROM Birds #42027). It is listed for Hazaribagh National Park (Ara 1960), and Saranda (Gupta 2006) of Jharkhand, though without further details. Ball (1878) reported it from Sambalpur, Odisha, and one of his specimens is in the National Museum of Ireland (#1887.2902.564; Sigwart *et al.* 2004). There are at least three recent photographs documented in Tim Inskipp's bibliography for Odisha (Inskipp 2015), and more recently Rabin Panigrahi photographed one individual in Ganjam District, Odisha,



224. The cryptic Mottled Wood Owl.

in October 2016 (Rabin Panigrahi, *in litt.*, 02 May 2017). Ali & Ripley (1987) treat the race found in Odisha as the nominate, while that in West Bengal and Bihar is thought to be *grisescens*. Ali & Ripley (1987) state that it is not found in Bangladesh or Assam. However, the American Museum of Natural History lists a male, and a female, collected from Cachar, Assam, by Walter Koelz on 24 April 1946 (AMNH Birds SKIN-462004-5); a careful perusal of the locality details (Bheraghat) reveals that the site is in Madhya Pradesh and not in Assam.

Hence, the two West Bengal records, Gauntlett (1986), and this, seem to be the eastern most limit of this species.

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