

Indian BIRDS

Vol. 15 No. 4



Identifying Sand Larks
'The Ripley Guide' update
Blue-cheeked Bee-eater



Indian BIRDS

www.indianbirds.in

VOL. 15 No. 4

DATE OF PUBLICATION: 16 DECEMBER 2019

ISSN 0973-1407

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PHOTOGRAPHER: Thirumoorti R. A.

BACK COVER: White-winged Redstart *Phoenicurus erythrogastrus*

PHOTOGRAPHER: Kalol Mukherjee

Field identification of Sand Lark *Alaudala raytal* and Lesser/Asian Short-toed Lark *Alaudala rufescens/cheleensis*: An unacknowledged pitfall

Prasad Ganpule

Ganpule, P., 2019. Field identification of Sand Lark *Alaudala raytal* and Lesser/Asian Short-toed Lark *Alaudala rufescens/cheleensis*: An unacknowledged pitfall. *Indian BIRDS* 15 (4): 97–111.

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Manuscript received on 24 May 2019.

Introduction

The Sand Lark *Alaudala raytal*, also known as Indian Short-toed Lark, is resident in Gujarat (Grimmett et al. 2011; Ganpule 2016). It is a polytypic species with three recognised subspecies: the nominate *A. r. raytal*, *A. r. adamsi*, and *A. r. krishnakumarsinhji*. The latter two occur in Gujarat (Ali 1954). *A. r. raytal* is not known to occur in the state and is resident in northern India, eastwards from Haryana, up to Assam, and Arunachal Pradesh (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012).

In Gujarat, the Sand Lark is fairly common and widespread in Kachchh and Saurashtra. It is seen in salt pans along the coast of Kachchh and Saurashtra, in other coastal areas of the state and, sometimes, inland too. The subspecies *adamsi* is widespread in Gujarat while *krishnakumarsinhji* is thought to be resident only in the Bhavnagar area (Ali 1954; Vaurie & Dharmakumarsinhji 1952). However, Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) stated that *krishnakumarsinhji* is resident in Kachchh too, and Abdulali (1976) stated that specimens from Kachchh are intermediate between *adamsi* and *krishnakumarsinhji*, and best fit the latter.

The Lesser Short-toed Lark (henceforth, LSTL) *A. rufescens* and the Asian Short-toed Lark (henceforth, ASTL) *A. cheleensis* are polytypic species, and are rare winter migrants or vagrants to India (Grimmett et al. 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012; Christian 2019). The separation of LSTL/ASTL from Sand Lark has not been given much importance in the reference texts widely used in India and only the general features of both are mentioned in Grimmett et al. (2011), and Rasmussen & Anderton (2012).

Here, I present preliminary results regarding the identification of the Sand Lark in Gujarat and its separation from LSTL/ASTL. The details presented are for *adamsi* and *krishnakumarsinhji*. The identification and separation of the Sand Lark from LSTL/ASTL is discussed in detail. The nominate race of Sand Lark has a

slim, long, and pointed beak, making it look quite different from a LSTL/ASTL, and, further, since this subspecies does not occur in Gujarat, it is beyond the scope of this paper.

The taxonomy of LSTL/ASTL is unresolved and all races of ASTL are sometimes treated under LSTL. Generic assignment of these species also varies between works (see Table 1); but here, I follow Praveen et al. (2019) and treat all three as distinct species under the genus *Alaudala*.

Methods and observations

I made 25+ trips in 2017–2019 along the Gulf of Kachchh, in Saurashtra, in the coastal areas in Kachchh, and also in other parts of Saurashtra to study Sand Larks. Observations were made all round the year, in all seasons. Birds were photographed and also observed closely with binoculars. In all, I photographed, and carefully studied, 200+ individuals in the field, including 25+ individuals of *krishnakumarsinhji* in Bhavnagar (Map 1). About 20 pairs of displaying Sand Larks were studied. The displaying bird was presumed to be a male while the bird being displayed to was presumed to be a female. I also observed copulation in a few pairs, which was helpful in identifying the sexes. I observed 20+ juvenile/immature Sand Larks; usually from April till late October. After the first winter, they are inseparable from adults. Variation in bill shape and size, plumage details, streaking on underparts and length of primary projection were noted in all the Sand Larks I saw and photographed. It is important to note that plumage may look a little different (paler) in the harsh sunlight of the summer and it is often difficult to judge the tail length, and bill size and shape if proper views are not obtained. No study was undertaken on the museum skins of Sand Larks and no vocalisations were recorded or analysed.

Table 1. Taxonomy of Sand Lark, Lesser Short-toed Lark (LSTL), and Asian Short-toed Lark (ASTL)

Reference	Sand Lark	Lesser Short-toed Lark	Asian Short-toed Lark
Grimmett et al. (2011)		Not covered	<i>Calandrella cheleensis</i>
Rasmussen & Anderton (2012)	<i>Calandrella raytal</i>	<i>Calandrella rufescens</i>	Treated under <i>C. rufescens</i>
Shirihai & Svensson (2018)			Treated under <i>A. rufescens</i>
Alström (2019); de Jauna & Suárez (2019)			Treated under <i>A. rufescens</i>
Dickinson & Christidis (2014); Gill & Donsker (2019); Clements et al. (2019); Praveen et al. (2019)	<i>Alaudala raytal</i>	<i>Alaudala rufescens</i>	<i>Alaudala cheleensis</i>



Map 1: Locations in Gujarat, India, which were visited for study of Sand Larks

I also studied 150+ photographs of Sand Larks from all parts of Gujarat from www.orientalbirdimages.org (henceforth, OBI), www.indianaturewatch.net (henceforth, INW), www.birdsofgujarat.co.in (henceforth, BOG), www.hbw.com/ibc (henceforth, IBC), and www.ebird.org/india and also collected photographs personally from bird watchers in the state. I have scrutinized photographs of Sand Larks from the coastal areas of Iran and southern Pakistan, since *adamsi* occurs in the coastal regions of these countries.

I examined photographs of LSTL/ASTL from Iran, Kazakhstan, other parts of Central Asia, western Russia, and also from the Middle East. I consulted Shirihai & Svensson (2018) as the primary reference, apart from Ali & Ripley (1987), Grimmett et al. (2011), Rasmussen & Anderton (2012), and de Jauna & Suárez (2019). The subspecies *persica*, *heinei*, *leucophaea*, *seebohmi*, and *cheleensis* are known to be migratory; some individuals are said to winter in the Middle East and the north-western parts of the Indian Subcontinent (de Jauna & Suárez 2019). The subspecies *pseudobaetica* is also migratory, but winters in Arabia and the

Middle East, and hence, could occur here. Photos of *persica*, *heinei*, and *cheleensis*, from Iran, Kazakhstan, other parts of Central Asia, Russia, Mongolia, and Far East Asia, posted on birding websites, were studied in detail to get an idea about variations seen in these subspecies. These subspecies of LSTL/ASTL are selected and discussed here since they are winter migrants and could occur / are known to occur in India. I include *heinei* and *persica* in LSTL, fully aware that this will likely change in the future. Generally, LSTL and ASTL are extremely similar and separation without examination of tail pattern and wing formula is often impossible (Shirihai & Svensson 2018). Here, I do not attempt to separate LSTL from ASTL and indicate the subspecies of LSTL/ASTL in the photographs presented here, while detailing separation of both from Sand Lark.

Results

The details for identification and separation of the Sand Lark from LSTL/ASTL are presented in Table 2:

Structure: The Sand Lark has a stocky body with a short tail. In comparison, LSTL/ASTL looks 'slenderer', with a longer tail, which is a very important distinction when separating the two in the field. However, tail length is tricky to evaluate in the field and, additionally, the birds should be seen from the side (in profile) to appreciate this difference. The best way to judge tail length is to compare it with body length; in the Sand Lark, the tail looks quite short when compared with body length while in LSTL/ASTL, it looks longer. While this comparison is subjective, this feature can be judged properly with experience. Though, some subspecies of LSTL/ASTL may look bulky or seem to look bulky from certain angles, it almost always looks longer tailed than a Sand Lark. The structure (body shape and tail length) is similar in Sand Larks of both *adamsi* and *krishnakumarsinhji* subspecies. Compare 120/121 with 122 for tail lengths in Sand Larks (*adamsi*/*krishnakumarsinhji*) and LSTL/ASTL. The outer web of r6 (outer tail feather) is white in both Sand Lark and LSTL/ASTL and not very useful in identification.

Table 2. Summary of identification features of Sand Lark and LSTL/ASTL

Feature	Sand Lark	LSTL/ASTL	Remarks
Structure	'Bulky' with short-tailed appearance	'Slenderer' with a longer-tailed appearance	Tail length is important and best seen from a side angle
Size	10.0–12.0 cm ¹ 12.0–13.0 cm ²	12.3–14.1 cm ¹ 13.0–14.0 cm ²	LSTL/ASTL is larger when compared directly; size of single individuals difficult to assess
Bill size and shape	Usually slender bill	Usually short, stubby, deep-based bill	Variable and hence not diagnostic
Underpart streaking	Variably streaked breast and flanks	Variably streaked breast and flanks	Similar and hence not useful
Face pattern	Usually weaker than LSTL/ASTL	Usually stronger than Sand Lark	Variable and hence not diagnostic
Upperpart streaking	Diffuse in <i>adamsi</i> but stronger in <i>krishnakumarsinhji</i>	Usually strongly streaked in fresh plumage	Similar and hence not useful
Primary projection	2–4 exposed primary tips	3–4 exposed primary tips	Similar and hence not useful. Difficult to assess in worn plumage

¹Rasmussen & Anderton (2012); ²Alström (2019); ³de Jauna & Suárez (2019)



120. Sand Lark: Pale sandy plumage with lightly streaked upperparts, short tail, and sparse breast-streaking. The overall sandy plumage with thin and sparsely streaked breast is typical of *adamsi*. Note somewhat heavy bill and longer primary projection. 12 May 2019, Jamnagar, Gujarat.



121. Sand Lark: Ssp. *krishnakumarsinhji*. Note very short tail when seen from the side and much worn brownish-grey plumage. Primary projection is long. The breast-streaking is prominent and forms lines when viewed from this angle. Strong bill. 21 April 2019, Bhavnagar, Gujarat.



122. Lesser Short-toed Lark: Prominently streaked crown and mantle. Note long tail and long primary projection. Breast-streaking is sparse and bill does not look very strong since it is open. Note dark culmen and tip. Presumed to be a *heinei*. Plumage is rather pale sandy. The long tail is very apparent when seen like this. 23 March 2019, Turkestan Region, Kazakhstan.

Bill size and shape: Though Sand Larks are described to have a finer/weaker bill than LSTL/ASTL, exceptions exist in Gujarat. There are many Sand Larks with a heavy bill, which approaches, or is even heavier, than the bill of a LSTL/ASTL. While *adamsi* is described as having a curved culmen, many birds here show a rather straight culmen, which is seen in both *adamsi* and *krishnakumarsinhji* Sand Larks. Some Sand Larks in Bhavnagar, presumed to be *krishnakumarsinhji*, had a very pale, whitish bill, which was rather long and pointed, and similar to the subspecies *raytal*. Other Sand Larks in the same area had a bill sized and shaped like *adamsi*. There is considerable variation in bill size and shape, which is depicted here in the photographs. Compare 125–127 for individuals of *adamsi* Sand Larks with weak bills, with 128–131 wherein birds with heavy to very heavy bills are depicted, and note the differences in bill shape and size in Sand Larks seen here. See 132–135 for differences in bill size and shape in Sand Larks of the subspecies *krishnakumarsinhji*.



125. Sand Lark: Pale sandy plumage with somewhat streaked upperparts, a weaker bill (with dark culmen and tip), short tail, and sparse breast-streaking. Note primary projection, which looks short. The overall sandy plumage with thin and sparsely streaked breast is typical of *adamsi*. 16 February 2019, Jamnagar, Gujarat.



126. Sand Lark: Note that bill is not very strong, looking yellowish with dark culmen and tip. Sandy-grey upperparts, streaked crown, medium-length primary projection with three exposed primary tips, tail looks relatively short. Breast-streaking is sparse. Upperparts look pale but streaked, with streaking more prominent on crown. Ssp. *adamsi*. 18 January 2015, Navlakhi, near Morbi, Gujarat.

Size: The Sand Lark is smaller-sized than LSTL/ASTL but without direct comparison in the field, it would be very difficult to judge size. However, it is a useful distinction when both species occur together. See 123 (a, b, c) and 124 (a, b, c) for size comparison in specimens of *adamsi* Sand Lark and LSTL/ASTL.



123a.



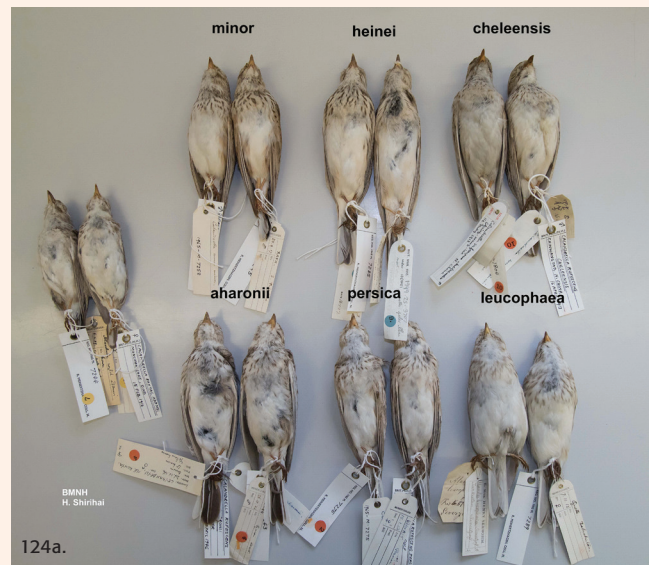
123b.



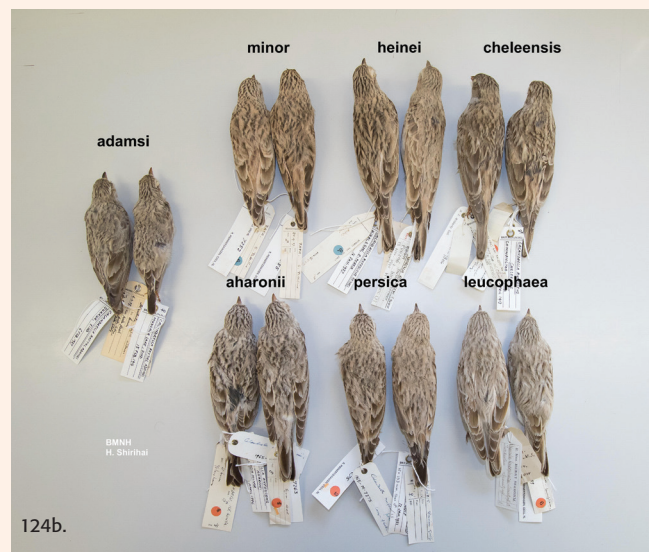
123c.

Lars Svensson

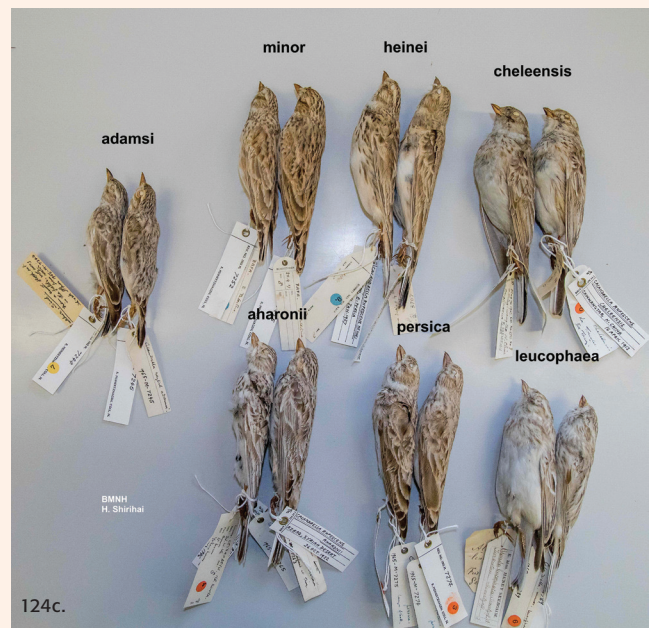
123 a, b, c. Comparison of Lesser Short-toed Lark and Sand Lark – Museum specimens: A comparison of museum specimens of *adamsi* Sand Larks (on the left) with *persica* Lesser Short-toed Larks (on the right) – ventral (a), dorsal (b) and side view (c). Note the longer tail, rufous or ochre-tinged upperparts and bulbous bill in *persica* when compared with *adamsi* Sand Lark. Specimens from the Natural History Museum (*henceforth*, NHM), London.



124a.



124b.



124c.

124 a, b, c. Comparison of Lesser/Asian Short-toed Lark and Sand Lark – Museum specimens: A comparison of museum specimens of *adamsi* Sand Larks (on the left) with Lesser/Asian Short-toed Larks (upper row and bottom row) – ventral (a), dorsal (b), and side (c) views. Note structure, bill shape, and size in Lesser/Asian Short-toed Larks. The subspecies *leucophaea* has the palest upperparts when compared to other subspecies depicted here. Compare LSTL/ASTL with Sand Lark and note structural differences along with different bill size and shape. Specimens from the NHM London.



127. Sand Lark: Sandy-grey upperparts. Somewhat weak and pointed bill, streaked crown and upperparts. Note the rather sparse breast-streaking. Bulky body with short tail. Note short primary projection and a slight hint of rufous around eye. Presumed *adamsi*. 09 March 2019, near Dwarka, Gujarat.



Ali: Prasad Ganpule

128. Sand Lark: The bill is quite strong for a Sand Lark and is similar to Lesser/Asian Short-toed Lark. Darker plumage (sandy-grey) with well streaked upperparts and well defined streaks on breast. It shows a much longer primary projection with 3–4 exposed primary tips; tertials are quite worn. The structure, with a bulky body and short tail (relative to body length), and typical sandy-grey plumage are different from a Lesser/Asian Short-toed Lark, even though bill size and shape are atypical. Ssp. *adamsi*. 06 May 2017, near Dwarka, Gujarat.



129. a,b. Sand Lark: This individual shows an unusually strong, massive bill, which is very atypical, with a curved lower mandible, and very similar to a Lesser/Asian Short-toed Lark. Other features, especially plumage and structure, and the poorly marked face, match a Sand Lark, and the position in which it is perched (front-leaning), makes it look slightly longer-tailed. Note how bill looks different when head angle changes [photo – 10 (b)], but still looks bulbous. Treated here as a Sand Lark but confirmation desirable. 10 March 2019, near Dwarka, Gujarat.



130. Sand Lark: Strong, deep-based bulbous bill, similar to a Lesser/Asian Short-toed Lark, and shows atypical bill (like in 128, 129). Sandy-grey, streaked upperparts. Breast-streaking is prominent with faint streaking on flanks. Streaked crown, nape, and upperparts. Long primary projection with 3 tips visible. Note very short tail and compact jizz. Treated here as a Sand Lark based on structure and plumage but further confirmation desirable. 10 March 2019, near Dwarka, Gujarat.



Jaysukh Parekh, Suman

131. Sand Lark: Note the deep-based bill, strong face pattern, and long primary projection, all recalling Lesser/Asian Short-toed Lark. Bill size and shape are atypical, and do not match that of a typical Sand Lark. Based on the compact jizz, pale sandy (less streaked) upperparts, short tail, and overall plumage, treated here as a Sand Lark but further confirmation desirable. 01 March 2017, Banni, Greater Rann of Kachchh.



132. Sand Lark: *krishnakumarsinhji*, with thinly streaked breast, brownish-grey upperparts, some breast-side streaking, strong bill, and streaked upperparts. Note the short primary projection and the short tail. The crest is raised. Underpart streaking is thinner and looks more sparse than usually seen in this subspecies. 21 April 2019, Bhavnagar, Gujarat.



133. Sand Lark: *krishnakumarsinhji*. Brownish-grey, streaked upperparts, and short tail. Note long primary projection. Sparse breast-streaking in centre with more prominent streaking on sides. Bill is strong. Compare with 156 and 157 and note similarity. 21 April 2019, Bhavnagar, Gujarat.



134. Sand Lark: *krishnakumarsinhji*. Prominently streaked upperparts (note streaking on lower mantle is similar to Lesser/Asian Short-toed Lark) with short primary projection and short tail. Note prominent breast-streaking. This individual shows a strong, but long and pointed bill, which looks quite pale. 21 April 2019, Bhavnagar, Gujarat.



135. Sand Lark: *krishnakumarsinhji*. Note much worn plumage with pale upperparts. Long primary projection with short tail. The bill is quite pale (almost whitish) and looks rather long and pointed, with a slender base, like in *raytal*. Prominent breast streaking. 21 April 2019, Bhavnagar, Gujarat.

Ali: Prasad Gampule

In museum specimens of *adamsi* Sand Larks, a consistency in bill structure and shape was noted, with all specimens having a rather thin, but much shorter bill, than *raytal*; no variations in bill size and shape were noted and all birds (n=90) in the Natural History Museum (NHM), had fairly slender bills (Lars Svensson, *in litt*, e-mail dated 02 May 2019). However, I noticed birds with heavier bills, which did not fit LSTL/ASTL and looked similar to Sand Larks based on structure, tail length, and plumage, as seen in the photographs presented here, illustrating an inconsistency between museum specimens and birds in the field.

The LSTL/ASTL has a short, stubbier, and deep-based bill than a Sand Lark, with a more feathered bill-base, often showing as a ruff around the bill base. However, *persica* and *heinei* have a heavy and deep-based bill, which sometimes looks quite similar to a Sand Lark with an atypical bill. The bill is pale yellow or horn-coloured, and is fairly large—see 136 for *persica* LSTL with a large, yellowish bill. Museum specimens of *persica* (and *heinei*) have a bulbous bill with curved outlines of both, upper, and lower mandibles (Lars Svensson, *in litt*, e-mail dated 02 May 2019). The bill size and shape of *cheleensis* is stated to be similar to *heinei/persica*, and from a study of photographs of birds from the distribution range of *cheleensis*, it can be noted that though bill size and shape is similar to *heinei/persica*, birds with short and fairly thin bills are sometimes seen: see Audevard (2013), Pelsy (2016), and Bogdanovich (2018) for photos of such individuals. See 137 for a LSTL/ASTL from Iran with a bill which is thin and does not appear deep-based. Further, *pseudobaetica*, which ranges from northern Iran to eastern Turkey, and which winters in northern Arabia and the Middle East, has a 'less bulbous and somewhat shorter bill' than *persica/arahunii* (Shirihai & Svensson 2018). This is depicted in Shirihai & Svensson (2018: 71, 3rd column, top), where it can be seen that bill size is smaller and the bill looks slimmer. The bill size and shape in this subspecies is very similar to that of a Sand Lark.

Thus, while bill shape and length could be indicative in separating Sand Lark from LSTL/ASTL, they cannot, by themselves, be used as diagnostic features due to such individual variations. Hence, the description, 'smaller or finer-billed' for Sand Lark when compared to LSTL/ASTL, could be misleading.



136. Lesser Short-toed Lark: Note the strong, deep-based yellowish bill, long primary projection, creamish tinge to plumage. Tail looks shorter due to the position/angle in which the bird is photographed. Note that the breast is sparsely streaked, with a dark neck-patch. Based on the strong bill, presumed to be *persica*. 22 May 2015, Band-e Ali Khan Marsh, Tehran, Iran.



137. Lesser/Asian Short-toed Lark: Bill is yellow, but not much deep-based and looks slender, with a feathered bill base. Sandy-pale yellowish plumage, with dark streaked head. Long primary projection and tail. Breast-streaking very sparse. Note similarity with Sand Lark but sandy-yellowish plumage (lacking grey), all yellow bill, long primary projection, and long tail are features which separate it from Sand Lark. An individual with somewhat atypical bill. Race unknown, but based on the weaker bill, does not resemble *persica*. 22 May 2015, Band-e Ali Khan Marsh, Tehran, Iran.

Both: Dorna Mojab

Underpart streaking: *A. r. krishnakumarsinhji* shows a breast that is darker and more heavily streaked vis-à-vis *admasi* (thinner- and sparsely streaked). However, there is considerable individual variation in breast-streaking in Sand Larks in Gujarat, with some birds showing quite sparse streaks. In a few individuals, it was observed that the streaks on the breast often coalesced into a larger dark neck-patch (see 138), similar to a Greater Short-toed Lark *C. brachydactyla* and Hume's Short-toed Lark *C. acutirostris*. This feature has not been described in the reference texts for Sand Lark but, has been noted in a few (n=15/200+) individuals that I have seen here in Gujarat.



Prasad Ganpule

138. Sand Lark: Sandy-grey upperparts. Strong, somewhat long and pointed bill, streaked crown and upperparts. Note the rather sparse breast-streaking, coalescing into a dark patch on neck-side, rather like a *C. brachydactyla* or *C. acutirostris*. Note faint streaking on flanks. Bulky body with short tail. Presumed *admasi*. 09 March 2019, near Dwarka, Gujarat.

Grimmett et al. (2011) and Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) state that flanks are somewhat streaked for LSTL/ASTL but do not describe this feature for Sand Lark. However some Sand Larks show streaking on the flanks; mostly rather fine, with thin streaks, and, in a few individuals, quite prominently (see 139). It should be noted that Vaurie & Dharmakumarsinhji (1954) describe *krishnakumarsinhji* as having 'greyish and faintly streaked' flanks. Thus, a few Sand Larks do show flank streaking, a feature which is similar to LSTL/ASTL, though the amount of streaking is variable. Further, many LSTL do not show prominent flank streaking as seen in the photos presented here.



Jaysukh Parekh 'Suman'

139. a, b. Sand Lark: This individual has fairly prominently streaked breast, streaking on the flanks, greyish-brown plumage with streaked head, pale (almost whitish) bill, longer primary projection (with four exposed primary tips visible). However, the plumage looks quite worn and primary projection looks longer due to worn tertials. Note compact jizz with short tail, typical of Sand Lark. Such birds are difficult to separate from Lesser/Asian Short-toed Larks but plumage, structure, and pale bill are features which should be noted. A probable *krishnakumarsinhji* or an intermediate. 18 November 2018, Naliya, Kachchh, Gujarat.



Jaysukh Parekh 'Suman'

The LSTL/ASTL has a prominently streaked breast, similar to a Sand Lark, but is described as having more prominent breast-streaking than *admasi*. However, when compared with *krishnakumarsinhji*, the breast-streaking in LSTL/ASTL looks quite similar, or sometimes, less prominent. Frequently, *krishnakumarsinhji* has almost 'tear-drop' shaped markings on the breast, which look very prominent. In the subspecies *cheleensis*, 'fine streaks on chest often coalesce into larger spot on sides', *heinei* has 'sharper streaking on breast', while *persica* has 'relatively few and narrow dark streaks on breast' (Shirihai & Svensson 2018). However, since breast streaking is variable in both, Sand Lark, and LSTL/ASTL, this feature is not very helpful in identification.

Face pattern: The Sand Lark has a weaker facial pattern than LSTL/ASTL with an obscured (almost lacking) dark lateral throat-stripe (Shirihai & Svensson 2018), a strongly streaked crown, with a relatively prominent supercilium extending beyond the eye, a broad whitish eye-ring often broken by dark, thin loreal mark, creating a pale crescent below eye and ill-defined pale sub-moustachial patch. This feature is also variable – see 140, 141 for differences in face pattern in Sand Larks. In general, it is true that the Sand Lark has a weaker facial pattern, but some individuals can show a stronger facial pattern (*pers. observation*) – see 142 a, b for such birds. Further, it can be seen in the photographs that, often, LSTL/ASTL shows a weaker facial pattern, similar to a Sand Lark. See 143, 144 for *persica* and *heinei* LSTL with a very plain face. This feature is not very helpful in identification in the field or from photographs. Both species can raise the crown feathers, creating a crest.



Prasad Ganpule

140. Sand Lark: Sandy-grey, streaked upperparts. Note the rather deep-based bill and stronger face pattern with prominent eye-ring bordered below by a blackish stripe. The breast-streaking is prominent with a small dark neck-patch. Primary projection looks long. Note typical bulky body with short tail. Presumed *admasi* or intermediate. 09 March 2019, near Dwarka, Gujarat.



Prasad Ganpule

141. Sand Lark: Sandy, streaked upperparts. Note the rather plain face pattern with reduced whitish eye-ring. Strong, deep-based, somewhat pointed bill. Sparse breast-streaking and short primary projection. Typical bulky body with short tail; *adamsi*. 03 March 2019, Navlakhi, near Morbi, Gujarat.



Prasad Ganpule

142. a, b. Sand Lark: **142a** shows a weaker bill, short primary projection, diffusely streaked breast, pale sandy-greyish plumage, short tail. The ear-coverts look dark and well streaked, with supercilium, and eye-ring visible. It is possibly a female.

142b also shows a strong face pattern, with darker ear coverts and a hint of a dark moustachial stripe. Note that the bill looks short and stubby in both individuals, similar to a LSTL/ASTL, but is subtly slimmer. Structurally, such birds have a very short tail, short primary projection, and the plumage is very pale sandy-greyish, which helps in identification. 14 January 2019, Chhari-Dhand, Greater Rann of Kachchh, Gujarat and 18 August 2019 near Navlakhi, Gujarat.



Dorna Mojib

143. Lesser Short-toed Larks: These individuals show the typical, thick and stubby, deep-based bill. Note that these birds look quite plain-faced. Note that the primary projection does not look very long (3 primary tips visible) and the upperparts are dark brownish and quite plain (worn plumage?). The breast streaking is sparse and restricted only to the upper breast, rather like what is seen in *adamsi*. Structurally, they look slender and longer-tailed. From locality and bill shape and size, presumed to be *persica*. Such birds bear resemblance to Sand Larks and need to be carefully examined for correct identification. 16 May 2015, Band-e Ali Khan Marsh, Tehran, Iran.



Arend Wassink

144. Lesser Short-toed Lark: Note long primary projection, and tail. The upperparts look less streaked (are plainer) but rufous wash on mantle is apparent. Bill is deep-based and strong.

A rufous wash is also seen on supercilium and face. However, note the rather plain-faced appearance. Some streaking is visible on the neck. Presumed to be *heinei*. 10 September 2009, Kyzylkol Lake, Kazakhstan.

Upperparts: Upperparts in Sand Lark are cold sandy-grey with diffused streaking, rather uniform wings (median coverts being less dark) and paler rump and uppertail coverts (Shirihai & Svensson 2018). Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) stated that it has pale cool grey and faintly streaked upperparts and is more weakly patterned above than LSTL/ASTL. However, it should be noted that the subspecies *krishnakumarsinhji* has more prominently streaked, darker greyish upperparts. In the birds observed in Saurashtra, there is considerable variation in upperpart streaking; some individuals are quite plain-backed, with almost no streaking, while many birds show very prominent streaking on the upperparts, similar to a LSTL/ASTL. This is dependent on wear of the upperpart feathers and the state of plumage, and birds in worn plumage look somewhat different. See **145** for an individual in worn plumage. Further, some individuals can have very pale, greyish-white upperparts [**146**]. Birds with plumage which is intermediate between *adamsi* and *krishnakumarsinhji* are also seen widely in Gujarat. It is not clear if the differences in plumage are related to the ground colour of its habitat; this requires more study.



Prasad Ganpule

145. Sand Lark: This individual is in much worn plumage. Note pink-horn bill and very long primary projection. The upperparts look worn and are brownish-grey. Breast streaking is sparse. The primary projection looks very long (5 primary tips visible!), probably due to worn tertials. The tail is quite short. The bill looks different than what is usually seen in *adamsi*, showing a curved lower mandible. Such birds are seen in May–June in Gujarat and look quite different from typical Sand Larks due to worn plumage. Further, this photo was taken in harsh sunlight and that is also affecting plumage tone. But note short tail and bulky body, typical of Sand Lark. Presumed *adamsi*. May 2014, near Dwarka, Gujarat.



Jaysukh Parekh 'Suman'

146. Sand Lark: Prominent breast and upperpart streaking. Primary projection is rather short. Bill is deep-based, rather like a LSTL/ASTL. Bulky body with short tail. Rather pale, greyish-white upperparts with contrasting greater coverts. Note very plain face pattern, but this individual shows a diffuse moustachial stripe. The typical structure and plumage are useful in identification. 02 December 2018, Naliya, Kutch, Gujarat.

The *persica* and *heinei* subspecies of LSTL have grey-brownish upperparts, which are prominently streaked. See **147** for a *persica* LSTL with prominently streaked upperparts. The taxon *cheleensis* is said to be similar to *heinei*, but is darker and browner above in direct comparison, and often rufous-tinged brown on upperparts (Shirihai & Svensson 2018). Many individuals of the subspecies *persica*, *heinei*, or *cheleensis* do not show any rufous in the upperparts. If a rufous tinge is seen in the plumage, it is a good indication that it could be a LSTL/ASTL as I have never seen any Sand Lark with rufous in wings or on the mantle. However, Abdulali (1976) stated that a specimen collected in Karachi, in 1903, and presumed to be *adamsi*, was very rufous, a character not shown by other specimens of Sand Larks in the Bombay Natural History Society collection. It is possible that this specimen could be a LSTL/ASTL instead of a Sand Lark, and should be re-checked, as based on this study and my observations in the field, the Sand Lark never shows any rufous in mantle or wings.



Ilya Ukolov

147. Lesser Short-toed Lark: Prominently streaked crown and mantle. Note strong, deep-based bill, long primary projection, long tail, and streaked flanks. Breast-streaking is sparse and more prominent on the sides. Plumage is rather brownish (lacks greyish tinge). Location is at extreme northern range of *persica* / within range of *pseudobaetica*, but bill much stronger than in latter and it is a *persica* LSTL. Such individuals present very little challenge in identification and are easy to separate from Sand Larks as they show all typical features of a LSTL. 20 April 2018, Shirvan, Azerbaijan.

In museum specimens, the upperparts in *adamsi* are tinged isabelline-drab, whereas the upperparts of the neighbouring *persica* LSTL are decidedly warmer and more ochrous-tinged (Lars Svensson, *in litt.*, e-mail dated 02 May 2019). This is a very important feature in separating the two, but, some LSTL/ASTL show dark brownish plumage without any rufous or ochrous tinge. In such individuals, often, grey tones in plumage are lacking, which is also helpful in separating the two. Similarly, some Sand Larks can show (but very rarely) a rufous tinge near the alula, on the flanks / near the rump or on the face, when viewed from certain angles or depending on how the sunlight falls on the bird [**148**]. But, the Sand Lark usually does not show any creamy tinge in plumage, which is frequently seen in LSTL/ASTL.



Prasad Ganpule

148. Sand Lark: This individual shows some rufous on face, alula, and a hint on breast-side. Note pale rufous fringes to greater coverts, but overall plumage is typical of Sand Lark, with sandy-grey upperparts and lacking rufous on mantle and wings. Tail is short and bill looks slender. The breast is prominently streaked. Note typical compact jizz. Only rarely does Sand Lark show rufous on face and coverts. 31 August 2019, Navlakhi, near Morbi, Gujarat.

Primary projection: Both, the Sand Lark, and LSTL/ASTL show a noticeable primary projection (extension of wing tips beyond tertials), a feature which helps in separating both from *C. brachydactyla* and *C. acutirostris*. Shirihai & Svensson (2018) stated that the primary projection in Sand Lark is shorter than in LSTL/ASTL, with only two to three visible primary tips (*versus* three to four in LSTL/ASTL). This is true when the Sand Lark is in fresh plumage or in 'typical' individuals. However, as seen in the photographs given here, Sand Lark often shows a longer primary projection, which is similar to a LSTL/ASTL. This is especially true for birds in worn plumage, when the tertials are worn away and the primary projection looks quite long, with three to four primary tips visible, and is rather like what is seen in LSTL/ASTL. It is prudent to check the state of plumage (whether worn or fresh) when judging the length of primary projection, and also account for variation, especially in atypical individuals. Sometimes, Sand Larks show contrastingly darker primaries with whitish tips on folded wings [**149**]. The primary projection in *adamsi* and *krishnakumarsinhji* is similar and both can show three to four visible tips, depending on wear to the tertials.



149. Sand Lark: Note white primary tips on visible primaries which are blackish. Note contrast of primaries with tertials, sandy-grey upperparts and fine streaks on flanks. Note that outer webs of tertials are paler than inner webs; this individual shows very slight rufous wash behind eye. Bill medium strong. Short tail. 31 August 2019, Navlakhi, near Morbi, Gujarat.

Sexual dimorphism in Sand Lark: Except Alström (2019), who states that the female is smaller than the male, all other works consider the Sand Lark to be sexually monomorphic. While single birds would be impossible to sex, it is sometimes possible to sex the birds when seen in pairs. Even when two males were displaying in front of one female, it was possible to separate the sexes in two instances. The male looks larger than the female in the field when both are seen together and, sometimes, the size difference is quite conspicuous. It was seen that in a few instances, the female had warmer brown, darker ear coverts, and a subtly smaller and stubbier bill than the male, in direct comparison (see **150 a, b**).



All: Prasad Ganpule

150. a, b. Sand Lark: Male (a), female (b). Note the stronger bill in male. The female shows subtly darker ear coverts. While this could be dependent on the sunlight and angle from which birds are seen, some differences between the sexes are often apparent, when they are seen together; *adamsi*. 21 March 2019, near Balammbha, Jamnagar.

Sand Lark – juvenile: Alström (2019) described juvenile Sand Larks as having 'whitish fringes and indistinct dark subterminal bands above'. In fresh plumage, juveniles show neat white fringes to scapulars, greater coverts, tertials, and wing tips, which are worn and replaced with adult feathers after moult. The white fringes on the crown and mantle are fairly prominent. The primary projection in juveniles looks quite long, with three to four exposed primary tips. Juveniles of *adamsi* are paler and more brownish with sparse breast-streaking, compared with those of *krishnakumarsinhji*, which look much darker, with darker greyish plumage, and diffused streaking on the breast. **151–153** show the variation in juvenile/immature Sand Larks seen in Gujarat. Although a juvenile LSTL/ASTL is quite like a juvenile Sand Lark, it is quite unlikely that a juvenile LSTL/ASTL would be seen in India. A photo of a juvenile LSTL/ASTL from Kazakhstan, taken in August and presumed to be *heinei*, is given here for reference [**154**]. This individual is in post juvenile moult and by October / November would look like an adult and would be difficult to age.



151. Sand Lark: Juvenile. White-fringed crown and scapulars. See neat white fringes to tertials and primary tips, with long primary projection and three visible primary tips. Tail also looks long. Plumage is pale brownish (central mantle feathers are replaced while wings are juvenile). This bird was seen along with adult shown in **145** – presumably its parent. May 2014, near Dwarka, Gujarat.



Ashok Mashru

152. Sand Lark: Juvenile. Note rather dark greyish plumage, with remnants of white fringes to crown, scapulars, and mantle. Long primary projection with four primary tips visible. See white fringes to primaries. Diffuse breast streaking; *krishnakumarsinhji*. Compare with **151** and see differences in plumage with *adamsi*. 16 September 2012, Bhavnagar, Gujarat.



Prasad Ganpule

153. Sand Lark: Juvenile. Note the pale fringes to crown, mantle, and scapulars. The greater coverts, tertials, and wing-tips have neat white fringes. Breast-streaking is diffuse. Long primary projection with short tail. Note rather deep-based bill. A juvenile *krishnakumarsinhji* undergoing post juvenile moult. 21 April 2019, Bhavnagar, Gujarat.



Arend Wassink

154. Lesser Short-toed Lark: In post juvenile moult. Note white fringes on mantle and scapulars, indicating the age. Note deep-based bill. Rufous-buff fringes to greater coverts. It is moulting its primaries (is missing approx. p7/8) and tertials / wings. It is re-growing its tail and hence looks short-tailed. Note long primary projection. Presumed *heinei*. 24 August 2010, Fetisovo, Mangghystau Province, Kazakhstan.

Review of photographs from Gujarat

Of 150+ photographs of Sand Larks from Gujarat that I studied, I found two individuals to be different.

a) The first was a bird photographed in Kachchh [155]. This individual had a protruding and feathered bill base, with a short and stubby bill, prominently streaked crown and mantle, dark brownish plumage with prominent whitish edges to primaries, wing-coverts and tertials, strongly streaked underparts, noticeable primary projection, and a long tail. As explained in the caption, it is most likely a LSTL/ASTL, based on the structure (slender body with long tail), black-and-white streaked head and mantle, and the plumage (where grey tones are absent in the upperparts). However, bill shape and size is not like a typical LSTL/ASTL, but, as explained here, such a bill size and shape is sometimes seen in *cheleensis*, or in *pseudobaetica*. This photo has now been removed from the OBI website (Krys Kazmierczak, *in litt.*, e-mail dated 16 February 2019). It was suggested by Lars Svensson that it is possible that the long tail could be an artefact or an example of extreme variation in Sand Lark, and since bill shape and colour is similar to a Sand Lark, this could be a Sand Lark rather than a LSTL/ASTL (Lars Svensson, *in litt.*, e-mail dated 02 May 2019). However, I have not seen any Sand Lark with such a long tail in my field study, or in any photographs from Gujarat, and, along with the feathered and protruding bill base, prominent white fringed tertials and wing-coverts along with absence of grey tinge in upperparts (all of which are absent in a Sand Lark), this individual seems to be, in my opinion, a LSTL/ASTL and not a Sand Lark. Based on the weaker bill, it could be a *cheleensis* or *pseudobaetica*. Hanne & Jens Eriksen have posted photos of a LSTL/ASTL from Oman with a similar beak shape and size (www.birdsoman.com). Also note that a LSTL/ASTL can frequently show a weaker bill. I treat this as a 'putative' LSTL/ASTL as, except for the bill shape and size, none of its features match a Sand Lark's.



Jugal Tiwari

155. Putative Lesser /Asian Short-toed Lark: Prominently streaked crown and mantle, a short and stubby bill with a feathered bill base, long tail, a moderate length primary projection, white-fringed tertials and wing-coverts, prominent streaking on breast. This individual is quite heavily streaked above and below. The bill size and shape look similar to a Sand Lark's but structurally, the tail is too long and the compact jizz is lacking. The upperparts are dark brownish (lacking grey tinge), with supercilium seen behind eye. It is considered to be a 'putative' Lesser/Asian Short-toed Lark. Subspecies unknown, but based on the weaker bill, does not appear to be *persica*. 24 January 2008, Bhadreshwar, Kachchh, Gujarat.

b) The second individual was photographed in Kachchh (Francis 2008). As explained in the caption for this individual [156], the features, at first glance, do not seem to fit a Sand Lark; this individual has a slender body and a primary projection with four exposed tips, stronger face pattern, brownish plumage; features that are more like LSTL. Note similarity with a *heinei* photographed from Kazakhstan [157] and compare with this individual from Gujarat, which has a shorter primary projection, subtly finer bill with a straight lower mandible, shorter tail, and less streaked upperparts, all of which fit a Sand Lark. Expert opinion (Per Alström) confirmed that this was a Sand Lark and the photos are retained on the OBI website (Krys Kazmierczak, *in litt.*, e-mail dated 16 February 2019). Similar individuals of *heinei*, if seen in the winter in Gujarat, could be quite easily be overlooked as Sand Larks unless observed closely.

Review of photographs of LSTL/ASTL from India

An overview of recent photographs of LSTL/ASTL from India is given by Christian (2019), who lists seven sightings of LSTL/ASTL from India, with a total of 21 photographs. While identification is correct in many cases, I raise identification concerns in four of the sightings, as listed below.

1) Photos 89–91 on page 81 (Faridabad, Haryana): The author quotes opinions from Tim Inskipp that it fits an LSTL/ASTL better and from Per Alström that it is probably *heinei*. However, I have different views. The photos show an individual with a rather weak and stubby bill which does not appear deep-based and is similar to a Sand Lark, and has grey-brown streaked upperparts. The tail looks quite short, which is also unlike a LSTL/ASTL. The primary projection looks short. Overall, it shows a compact jizz. This individual does not seem to be a LSTL/ASTL, and looks more like a Sand Lark, most likely an *adamsi*.

2) Photos 80–82 on page 81 (Desert National Park, Rajasthan): The identification here is tricky. The author quotes an opinion from Per Alström for these photographs as not a



Clement Francis

156. Sand Lark: The primary projection is long (with four exposed primary tips visible), the mantle is streaked, plumage looks brownish-grey and is not sandy/greyish, and bill looks strong. Compare plumage with other Sand Larks shown here. Note that structurally, this individual has an apparently slender body but its tail is very short. The plumage looks somewhat different from the Sand Larks seen in Gujarat but based on the weakly streaked upperparts, compact jizz, and subtly finer bill, it can be identified as a Sand Lark – 09 March 2008, Bhadreswar, Kachchh, Gujarat.



Pavel Parkhaev

157. Lesser Short-toed Lark: Note the strongly streaked upperparts, sparse breast streaking, and strong bill. Note that the primary projection is very long with four exposed primary tips, which make the tail look short. Note how similar this individual is to **156**. The upperparts in this individual look more streaked when compared with the bird from Kachchh, but see the almost similar bill shape and size. Also compare with **133** (a *krishnakumarsinhi* which shows similar upperpart streaking). The strong bill and plumage indicates *heinei*. 25 May 2017, Almaty Region, Kazakhstan.

Sand Lark, but likely from the *heinei* group. However, based on the results of my studies, I differ in my views. The individual in Photo 80 has a typical 'bulky' body with a short tail, similar to a Sand Lark. The upperparts look streaked but sandy-grey. The bill looks thin. The overall structure, plumage, and the bill size and shape are more similar to a Sand Lark rather than LSTL/ASTL. This individual is most likely a Sand Lark. Photo 81 shows two individuals, which again show features similar to a Sand Lark; a bulky body with short tail, sandy upperparts, and weaker bill. These birds are also most likely Sand Larks. Photo 82 shows a bird with bulky body, short tail, greyish streaked upperparts, and it has a 'large-headed' appearance. The beak is open with a drop of water on the lower mandible. The bill size and shape also fits a Sand Lark more than LSTL/ASTL. Looking at the overall structure and plumage, along with bill size and shape, this individual is most likely a Sand Lark.

3) Photos 92–94 on page 82 (Desert National Park, Rajasthan): The photos show an individual with a long tail, deep-based bill, streaked ear coverts and long primary projection. This is correctly identified as an LSTL/ASTL. In Photo 94, it is noted on Jacob (2018) that the first (extreme left) and the third (extreme right) birds are LSTL/ASTL. In fact, the first bird is a Sand Lark and in direct comparison to the LSTL/ASTL, it can be seen that the first bird is smaller, has a shorter tail, a smaller and weaker beak and is structurally different. This photo is most useful as a direct comparison between both species can be made. Similarly, in Photo 93, the second bird is most likely a Sand Lark. Thus, both individuals are not LSTL/ASTL and one is a Sand Lark.

4) Photos 95–97 on page 82 (Tal Chappar): The bird is seen only from the front and the primary projection is not visible. The tail looks rather short (see photo Macaulay Library ML 133035191), and wings and mantle look quite plain. Thus, it is difficult to judge tail length while other features (like primary projection and upperpart streaking) are not visible. The bill looks

quite bulbous and is similar to an LSTL/ASTL. But, looking at the variation seen in bill size and shape in Sand Lark and LSTL/ASTL, it is difficult to confirm the identification of this individual from the given photos and this should not be identified to the specific level.

To summarize, one of the records has both, the Sand Lark, and LSTL/ASTL in the same flock, two of the records are most likely Sand Lark, and one of them cannot be identified with certainty. These examples illustrate the difficulties in separating LSTL/ASTL from Sand Larks in India. The other three sightings given in Christian (2019) are correctly identified: by Sandip Das from West Bengal (Photos 86–88 on p. 81); Abhijeet Mhaskar from Tal Chappar, Rajasthan (Photos 83–85 on p. 81); and Nayana Amin from Tal Chappar, Rajasthan (Photos 98–100 on p. 82). Another photograph posted in 'Delhibirdpix' group on the same day, and from the same location (Prosenjit 2019) as Photos 98–100 also shows an individual with long tail, deep based bill, prominent breast-streaking, and prominent median coverts—correctly identified as an LSTL/ASTL. The same photographer posted another picture on 'OBPix' (psd 2019) labelled as Sand Lark from Tal Chappar. It also shows a bird with a long tail, deep-based bill and long primary projection, features which are conclusively that of an LSTL/ASTL. However, photos 98–100, taken on the previous day, seem to be of a different individual and this bird has a slightly deformed upper mandible.

Review of photographs of LSTL and Sand Lark in Shirihai & Svensson (2018)

In Volume I, page 73—photos on the top of the page are given as LSTL of the subspecies *persica* from Iran. However, both these individuals are not like typical *persica* seen in Iran and are likely to be Sand Larks. The rather pale and greyish plumage, weak bill, shorter primary projection, and the bulky body with the short tail, thus showing a compact jizz, are indicative of this. Lars Svensson

suggested that the birds in these photos are not conclusively identifiable as LSTLs and are probably Sand Larks, and these images would be replaced if the volume is reprinted (Lars Svensson, *in litt.*, e-mail dated 06 February 2019). Similarly, a photo of Sand Lark (p. 76 – bottom) in the same volume is given as a Sand Lark of the *adamsi* subspecies. However, this individual shows the typical slim, long, and pointed bill seen in *raytal*, which is not known to occur in the Western Palaearctic region, and hence, is incorrectly depicted since it is a *raytal* Sand Lark.

Variation in Sand Larks in Gujarat

Based on this study, both, *adamsi*, and *krishnakumarsinhji* are seen in Saurashtra and Kachchh. Birds with intermediate-type plumage are also widespread. Birds with heavier streaking on upperparts and underparts, resembling *krishnakumarsinhji*, are seen widely and such *krishnakumarsinhji*-type individuals are not restricted to Bhavnagar, the locality where they are known to occur. This has been referred to by Abdulali (1976) and Rasmussen & Anderton (2012), who state that *krishnakumarsinhji*-type birds occur in Kachchh also. In Bhavnagar, where only *krishnakumarsinhji* is said to occur, there is considerable variation in underpart/upperpart streaking and bill shape and size, as depicted in the photographs. It is interesting to note that some birds in Bhavnagar had pale, almost whitish bills, a hitherto unreported feature for this subspecies. While *krishnakumarsinhji* is in general darker, I found that the difference in plumage is also dependent on feather wear and sun-bleaching, with *krishnakumarsinhji* looking greyer and darker than *adamsi* in worn plumage.

Looking at the widespread distribution of *krishnakumarsinhji*-type individuals in Gujarat, it is possible that birds with heavy streaking on upperparts/underparts could be mistaken as LSTL/ASTL as it is not common knowledge that such individuals occur outside the Bhavnagar area. Hence, this factor has to be looked into when identifying Sand Lark or LSTL/ASTL in any part of Gujarat.

Discussion

Field identification of Sand Lark and LSTL/ASTL

Based on the results of this study, it can be seen that the identification challenge for LSTL/ASTL vis-à-vis the Sand Lark has not been adequately dealt with in various works, and the pitfalls are not well-documented. Considerable variations in the features of a Sand Lark and LSTL/ASTL exist and it can be argued that there is no single, diagnostic feature, which can separate a Sand Lark from LSTL/ASTL in the field. However, in profile the tail looks longer in LSTL/ASTL compared to a Sand Lark, and this is an important characteristic for identification though it is difficult to judge in single individuals in the field and from photographs, particularly without a reference. The shorter tail of Sand Lark apparent in the field is borne out by specimens (Table 3).

The Sand Lark is described as being 'finer billed' (Grimmett et al. 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012; Shirihai & Svensson 2018) while Alström (2019) stated that it has 'proportionately longer and slimmer bill than *C. rufescens* (mainly *persica* and *leucophaea*)'. However, none of the works mention that a Sand Lark can sometimes show a bill structure similar to that of LSTL/ASTL. I observed and documented this in the Sand Larks in Gujarat, but it could also be true for elsewhere in its range where *adamsi* occurs. Hence, using bill structure as a key feature to identify an LSTL/ASTL, anywhere in India, should be done with caution.

Lars Svensson suggested that for a lark with a heavier bill, other explanation than individual variation within Sand Larks should be considered and, it might not be a Sand Lark at all, as not a single specimen of Sand Lark was found with a strong or bulbous bill in the NHM collection, London, and such a bill variation would have been represented in the fairly large specimen collection (n=90). However, it seems unlikely that these individuals with heavy bills are LSTL/ASTL and genetic analysis and measurements will clarify this. But based on this study, it seems this variation in bill size and shape in Sand Larks can possibly be attributed to individual variation but questions remain as to why museum specimens of *adamsi* do not show this bill variation. It is possible that such bill variation is seen only in Gujarat and a larger sample size taken from the state will represent the variation in bill shape and size.

The plumage for Sand Lark is described as 'rather uniform sandy-grey upperparts (with streaking most prominent on crown)' by Grimmett et al. (2011), 'pale cool grey and faintly streaked upperparts' and 'greyer and more weakly patterned above than LSTL' by Rasmussen & Anderton (2012), and 'less distinctly streaked upperparts' than LSTL/ASTL by Alström (2019). For LSTL/ASTL, Shirihai & Svensson (2018) report *heinei* as generally darker, more heavily streaked above than *persica*. They describe *cheleensis* as rather similar to *heinei* and *persica*, but generally darker and browner above in direct comparison, with fine streaks on breast often coalescing into larger spot on the breast side. The plumage in all these species may not agree with what is described in various works due to feather wear. None of the works have compared the stronger underpart and upperpart streaking in *krishnakumarsinhji* Sand Lark with LSTL/ASTL. While this factor is localized to Gujarat, it is misleading when the texts refer to LSTL/ASTL as having 'more distinctly streaked mantle and breast', when this subspecies of Sand Lark is similar.

It is also important to note that the plumage colour in photographs can be misleading since it depends, to some extent, on the contrast with the soil colour in which the bird is photographed. For example, based on my personal observations in Gujarat, it was noted that if an *adamsi* Sand Lark is seen in wet marine soil (which is blackish), the plumage looks bright sandy while in the brownish/sandy coloured soil of Little Rann of Kachchh, a similar *adamsi* Sand Lark looks paler. Such perceived colour differences are also true for LSTL/ASTL as found in *heinei*

Table 3. Tail lengths in Sand Lark and LSTL/ASTL

	Sand Lark <i>adamsi</i>		Sand Lark <i>krishnakumarsinhji</i>	LSTL <i>persica</i>		LSTL <i>heinei</i>		ASTL <i>cheleensis</i>	
	Male	female		male	female	male	female	male	female
Tail length (mm)	40-51 (n=20)	42-48 (n=14)	42-50 (n=11)	55-66 (n=20)	53-62 (n=10)	58-67 (n=24)	55-62 (n=16)	58-70 (n=11)	58-67 (n=12)

Source: Measurements for Sand Lark *krishnakumarsinhji* are taken from Vaurie & Dharmakumarsinhji (1954). All other measurements are taken from Shirihai & Svensson (2018).

in Kazakhstan, where, in the reddish sand around Kyzylkol Lake, the colour of *heinei* looks different, but is almost the same as in other parts of its range (Arend Wassink, *in litt.*, e-mail dated 09 April 2019). The plumage is similar but the soil colour influences our perception of plumage tone. Camera settings will also affect the plumage tone and it is important to get it as natural as possible. All this becomes important for field observers to watch for and photograph the birds in different conditions and select the photos with most natural tones to discuss the identification.

For primary projection, Grimmett et al. (2011) stated that in Sand Lark 'primaries extend beyond tertials on closed wing', Rasmussen & Anderton (2012), and Shirihai & Svensson (2018) stated that 'LSTL/ASTL has a longer primary projection than Sand Lark', while Alström (2019) said it has a 'distinct primary projection'. None of these references stated that the primary projection in LSTL/ASTL and Sand Lark can be similar, with Sand Lark also showing three to four primaries beyond tertials in worn plumage or in atypical individuals. Length of primary projection or number of visible primary tips on closed wing is a feature which can be variable in these species.

The sexual dimorphism in Sand Lark, with the female Sand Lark often showing darker ear-coverts, is not mentioned in any of the works cited here. This observation is of interest since, in many cases, the female Sand Lark, by showing darker ear coverts, a somewhat stronger face pattern, and a shorter and stubbier bill, looks quite similar to a LSTL/ASTL. But, its typical structure, with a bulky body and a short tail, along with the usually paler plumage, is helpful in separating it from LSTL/ASTL. Ideally, a large number of birds, of both sexes, should be trapped and sexed to confirm this.

The descriptions of juvenile plumages of both subspecies of Sand Lark, and, especially, the longer primary projection present in a juvenile, is another feature which has not been mentioned in these works. Hence, using only the primary projection as the diagnostic feature of LSTL/ASTL has another pitfall; these could also be young Sand Larks and it is important to note whether the observed individual shows any remnants of juvenile plumage and it is sometimes necessary to age the individual or this could lead to confusion / misidentification.

It may be noted that this identification problem is essentially limited to separating *adamsi* and *krishnakumarsinhji* from LSTL/ASTL. The slim, long, and pointed bill in *raytal* is also confirmed by museum studies of specimens (n=84) at the NHM, London, where *raytal* was immediately identifiable and separable from LSTL/ASTL based on the long and thin bill (Lars Svensson, *in litt.*, e-mail dated 02 May 2019). But, *adamsi* intergrades with *raytal* in northern India in Haryana (Alström 2019) and the bill size and shape in such intergrades is not known and requires further study.

For individuals correctly identified as LSTL/ASTL from photographs taken in India, it is impossible to identify the subspecies involved given our present knowledge. Hence, if there is a taxonomic revision, the correct species to be added to the national checklist will be based, purely, on museum specimens or trapped birds. It is pertinent to note here that the few photos of LSTL/ASTL presented in this paper are only to illustrate the challenges in separating it from Sand Lark and are in no way representative of their variation.

In summary, the emphasis on Sand Lark being 'finer-billed', 'less heavily streaked', or having 'shorter primary projection' is not justified as these features are variable, at least in Gujarat, and there is considerable overlap with LSTL/ASTL.

Status of LSTL/ASTL and Sand Lark in Gujarat

LSTL/ASTL is not included in the Gujarat checklist (Parasharya et al. 2004; Ganpule 2016; Ganpule 2017). However, the photographs by Jugal Tiwari, from Kachchh, are of a putative LSTL/ASTL and hence a potential candidate for the Gujarat checklist. A few birds, shown here in the photographs and treated as Sand Larks show atypical bills, which are deep-based and heavy, and which are quite similar to LSTL/ASTL; these are presumed to be Sand Larks based on structure and plumage but further confirmation by trapping and obtaining biometric and genetic data is desirable. In general, unfamiliarity with variations in plumage and bill size and shape in Sand Lark and LSTL/ASTL among birders here is an important factor and it is quite likely that LSTL/ASTL could be overlooked even if seen here and photographed.

The variation seen in *adamsi* / *krishnakumarsinhji* in Gujarat is not well understood. Molecular studies of Sand Larks should be carried out on a large scale in the state, and biometric data collected, to understand the variation seen here. I believe that if the so-called 75% rule, meaning that at least three quarters of a sample of individuals of a subspecies, selected at random, must differ diagnosably from other described subspecies within the examined species (Shirihai & Svensson 2018), is applied in the case of Sand Lark in Gujarat, the results might be interesting. Based on this study, it seems that since both *adamsi* and *krishnakumarsinhji*-type individuals are seen widely over the state, it is probable that the subspecies *krishnakumarsinhji* may not be found to be diagnosably different from *adamsi* but further research is required. It also necessary to know if there are differences in calls or songs of *adamsi* and *krishnakumarsinhji* before arriving at any conclusion. Individuals with plumage which is intermediate between these two subspecies will also have to be looked at and examined. Surprisingly, the Sand Lark has not been studied in great detail by ornithologists, Indian or European, and there remains much to be learnt. Gujarat is an ideal location to study the Sand Lark further and it is hoped that this work will inspire others to look more closely at the taxa involved and the details presented here may be confirmed or further refined.

Conclusion

The identification and separation of Sand Lark of the *adamsi* and *krishnakumarsinhji* subspecies, from LSTL/ASTL is more challenging than what is documented in existing literature. It is advisable to take as many photographs as possible and consider the following points before concluding the identification:

- a) Profile photographs showing ratio of tail length to body.
- b) Photographs with, preferably, other birds in the same image for size comparison.
- c) Photographs against multiple backgrounds, if possible, so that plumage can be accurately assessed.
- d) Field features and associated field notes that would give an indication about the sex and age of the individual bird.
- e) Proper camera settings for colour accuracy.

It is urged that all Sand Larks in Gujarat be carefully observed and photographed by birders, especially in the winter, as it is probable that the LSTL/ASTL occurs here, but is overlooked.

The Sand Larks in Gujarat need to be examined in detail, genetically, and biometric data collected on a large scale to understand the genetic distance and variation in the subspecies *adamsi* and *krishnakumarsinhji*. Existing specimens

of Sand Larks (Bombay Natural History Society: 17 *adamsi*, 9 *krishnakumarsinhji*, 5 *raytal*; NHM: 90 *adamsi*, 84 *raytal*; United States National Museum: 3; American Museum of Natural History: 4) in museums could add to the samples of this study. A study of calls/songs of Sand Larks, from different regions, will add to the integrative taxonomy of the species.

Acknowledgements

A query by Lars Svensson inspired me to study the Sand Lark in Gujarat and I am grateful for all his help and support. I thank Hadoram Shirihai, Per Alström, Arend Wassink, Krysztof Kazmierczak, and Alireza Hashemi for their help. I am thankful to Dorna Mojab, Arend Wassink, Ilya Ukolov, Gennadiy Dyakin, Pavel Parkhaev, Jugal Tiwari, Clement Francis, Jaysukh Parekh 'Suman', and Ashok Mashru for contributing photographs. I am especially thankful to Lars Svensson and Hadoram Shirihai for the photographs of the museum specimens, and for their inputs. I thank Hein Van Grouw for information about the number of specimens of Sand Larks in NHM, London. I am grateful to my friends and fellow birders: Ashwin Trivedi, Ashok Mashru, Manoj Finava, Kapilsinh Zala, Gaurang Bagda, Maulik Varu, Swadeepsinh Jadeja, Jayesh K. Joshi, and Jignesh Miyatra for their company in the field, which made the field trips enjoyable.

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Birds of South Asia: Additions over ‘The Ripley Guide’

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Praveen J., Jayapal, R. & Rasmussen, P.C., 2019. Birds of South Asia: Additions over ‘The Ripley Guide’. *Indian BIRDS* 15 (4): 112–116.

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Manuscript received on 17 August 2019.

The term ‘South Asia’ has been framed in varying contexts to represent the southern region of the Asian continent. It is still commonly used synonymously with the term ‘Indian Subcontinent’, a cohesive biogeographical unit comprising the seven sub-Himalayan countries: Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. In recent years, however, the term ‘South Asia’ is increasingly used in a geopolitical context to reflect the geographical extent of the eight member-countries of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), namely, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Rasmussen & Anderton (2005, 2012), for their editions of ‘The Ripley Guide’ (BSA1 & BSA2), used this latter definition and, additionally, included the Chagos Archipelago (henceforth, Chagos), also known as the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) lying south of the Maldives on the same undersea ridge.

Since the publication of BSA2, there have been several additions to the South Asian avifauna, including a reassessment of past records (see Table 1). We base the inclusion of species, in the Table below, on past evaluations of inclusion/exclusion for the Indian Subcontinent (Praveen et al. 2017; Praveen et al. 2019e), Afghanistan (Praveen 2018), and Chagos (Carr 2015); and do not make any fresh evaluations. For matters of taxonomy, we follow Praveen et al. (2019b); the list of species in Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) is mapped to this taxonomy to create the Table. Two subspecies that carried individual accounts in BSA2, as hypothetical/possible for the region, were also added to the Indian avifauna, namely, Baltic Gull *Larus fuscus fuscus* (Williams & Gottschling 2018) and Black-browed Tit *Aegithalos iouschistos bonvaloti* (Sangha et al. 2013). However, we only list the species recognised by Praveen et al. (2019b) in the Table below.

In terms of evidence (see Praveen et al. 2016 for definitions), two of the species are supported by preserved specimens (Cory’s

Table 1. Additions to the birds of South Asia over ‘The Ripley Guide’

No.	Species	Status in BSA2	Evidence	Status	Country
1	Red-breasted Goose <i>Branta ruficollis</i>	Hypothetical	Media	Vagrant. Photographic records from Uttar Pradesh (Panwar & Panwar 2014) and Himachal Pradesh (Abhinav et al. 2018)	IN
2	Australian Shelduck <i>Tadorna tadornoides</i>	Hypothetical	Media	Vagrant. A few individuals photographed in Chagos; and convincingly argued to be wild vagrants (Carr 2015)	BIOT
3	Namaqua Dove <i>Oena capensis</i>	Not included	Media	Vagrant. Photographed in western Gujarat (Trivedi & Trivedi 2018; Patel & Raol 2018); its provenance was concluded as a wild vagrant (Praveen et al. 2019)	IN
4	Horsfield’s Bronze Cuckoo <i>Chalcites basalís</i>	Not included	Media	Vagrant. Photographed in the Great Nicobar Island (Gokulakrishnan et al. 2018)	IN
5	White-browed Crake <i>Amaurornis cinerea</i>	Not included	Media	Vagrant. A long-staying individual photographed in north-eastern Assam (Gogoi & Phukan 2016)	IN
6	Sooty Shearwater <i>Ardenna grisea</i>	Hypothetical	Sight record	Vagrant or probably a rare passage migrant over the seas around the Maldives; multiple sightings with field notes (Anderson et al. 2016)	ML
7	Cory’s Shearwater <i>Calonectris borealis</i>	Not included	Specimen	Vagrant. One specimen recovered from the coasts of Kerala and preserved at Zoological Survey of India, Kozhikode (Praveen et al. 2014)	IN
8	Tahiti Petrel <i>Pseudobulweria rostrata</i>	Not included	Media	Vagrant. One photographed from the seas around Chagos (Carr 2015)	BIOT
9	Matsudaira’s Storm-Petrel <i>Oceanodroma matsudaira</i>	Hypothetical	Media	Presumably a regular visitor to the seas around Chagos (Carr 2015)	BIOT
10	White-eared Night Heron <i>Gorsachius magníficus</i>	Not included	Media	Vagrant. One photographed in Bihar (Shafi et al. 2018)	IN
11	Javan Pond Heron <i>Ardeola speciosa</i>	Not included	Media	Vagrant or probably rare winter visitor to the Andaman Islands (Gokulakrishnan et al. 2018; Shaktivel 2019)	IN
12	Chinese Egret <i>Egretta eulophotes</i>	Not included	Media	Photographed on the Andaman Islands and presumably a regular winter visitor there, since (Sivaperuman et al. 2016)	IN

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No.	Species	Status in BSA2	Evidence	Status	Country
13	Abbott's Booby <i>Papasula abbotti</i>	Hypothetical	Media	Vagrant. One bird photographed from the Maldives (Anderson et al. 2016)	ML
14	Far Eastern Curlew <i>Numenius madagascariensis</i>	Hypothetical	Media	Vagrant. One bird photographed in the Chagos Archipelago (Carr 2015)	BIOT
15	Sabine's Gull <i>Xema sabini</i>	Not included	Media	Vagrant. One photographed on the coasts of Kerala (Sreenivasan et al. 2013)	IN
16	Franklin's Gull <i>Leucophaeus pipixcan</i>	Not included	Sight record	Vagrant. One sighting, with field notes, from the coast of Goa (Holt et al. 2013; Praveen et al. 2014)	IN
17	White-eyed Gull <i>Ichthyophaga leucophthalmus</i>	Hypothetical	Media	Vagrant. One bird photographed from the coasts of northern Karnataka (Jamalabad 2016), considered of wild provenance (Praveen et al. 2019)	IN
18	Caspian Gull <i>Larus cachinnans</i>	Hypothetical	Media	Regular winter visitor to the coasts of Gujarat (Ganpule 2015) and presumably also in inland lakes of the northern Indian Subcontinent	IN
19	Mongolian Gull <i>Larus smithsonianus mongolicus</i>	Hypothetical	Media	Vagrant or rare winter visitor to eastern coasts of the Indian Subcontinent (Dutta 2013; Praveen et al. 2014)	IN
20	Black Tern <i>Chlidonias niger</i>	Hypothetical	Media	Rare passage migrant through the region (Carr 2013; Bhatt et al. 2014; Bhatia 2016; Jamalabad 2016; Reghuvaran et al. 2017; Koenraads et al. 2018)	IN, BIOT
21	European Honey-Buzzard <i>Pernis apivorus</i>	Hypothetical	Media	Vagrant. One bird photographed in the Chagos Archipelago (Carr 2015)	BIOT
22	Red Kite <i>Milvus milvus</i>	Hypothetical	Sight record	Vagrant. One bird sight recorded with field notes from Uttarakhand (Naoroji & D'Silva 1988). Considered hypothetical by Rasmussen & Anderton (2012), but accepted subsequently based on field notes (Praveen et al. 2016)	IN
23	Grey-faced Buzzard <i>Butastur indicus</i>	Hypothetical	Media	Vagrant to the Andaman & Nicobar Islands (Manchi et al. 2014; Zaibin et al. 2014)	IN
24	Blue-throated Bee-eater <i>Merops viridis</i>	Not included	Media	Vagrant. A long-staying individual photographed in northern Kerala; considered of wild provenance (Manekkara 2016; Praveen et al. 2019)	IN
25	Red-footed Falcon <i>Falco vespertinus</i>	Hypothetical	Specimen	Vagrant. An old specimen at NHM, Tring from Gilgit, Kashmir (Prŷs-Jones et al. 2017)	IN
26	Lord Derby's Parakeet <i>Psittacula derbiana</i>	Hypothetical	Media	Resident or breeding visitor to the Upper Lohit Valley in north-eastern Arunachal Pradesh (Praveen et al. 2015)	IN
27	Blue-winged Pitta <i>Pitta moluccensis</i>	Not included	Media	Photographed on Narcondom Island (Manchi & Kumar 2014) where presumably a rare passage migrant	IN
28	Swinhoe's Minivet <i>Pericrocotus cantonensis</i>	Hypothetical	Media	Rare passage migrant through much of the Indian Subcontinent (Rajguru & Ukil 2016; Sridharan et al. 2016; Theba et al. 2018)	IN
29	Pied Crow <i>Corvus albus</i>	Not included	Media	Vagrant. Photographed in the Thar Desert, Rajasthan, with debatable provenance (Saikia & Goswami 2017), but subsequently considered of wild provenance (Praveen et al. 2019)	IN
30	Amur Paradise-flycatcher <i>Terpsiphone incei</i>	Not included	Media	Vagrant or rare winter visitor to the Andaman Islands (Grundsten et al. 2018)	IN
31	Masked Shrike <i>Lanius nubicus</i>	Possible	Media	Vagrant. One photographed from southern Gujarat (Bharti 2017)	IN
32	Chestnut-flanked White-eye <i>Zosterops erythropleurus</i>	Not included	Media	Photographed in Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh (Sailo et al. 2018; Lobo et al. 2018) and presumably a rare passage migrant through north-eastern India	IN
33	Eastern Yellow Wagtail <i>Motacilla tschutschensis</i>	Hypothetical	Media	Photographed in northern-eastern India and the Andamans (Viswanathan et al. 2017) and presumably a winter migrant to those parts	IN
34	Three-banded Rosefinch <i>Carpodacus trifasciatus</i>	Hypothetical	Sight record	Vagrant. One sight record with field notes (Clements 1992) from Bhutan: considered hypothetical in Rasmussen & Anderton (2012), but accepted subsequently based on field notes (Praveen et al. 2017)	BH
35	Chinese White-browed Rosefinch <i>Carpodacus dubius</i>	Hypothetical	Media	Vagrant. One photographed in north-eastern Arunachal Pradesh (Praveen et al. 2016)	IN
36	Pink-rumped Rosefinch <i>Carpodacus waltoni</i>	Possible	Media	Vagrant. One photographed in northern Bengal (Sengupta 2017)	IN
37	Godlewski's Bunting <i>Emberiza godlewskii</i>	Hypothetical	Media	Breeding resident in Upper Lohit Valley of north-eastern Arunachal Pradesh (Gode 2013; Sharma et al. 2014)	IN
38	Rustic Bunting <i>Emberiza rustica</i>	Hypothetical	Media	Vagrant. One photographed in Bhutan (Lilje 2017), and sight records from Nepal (Praveen et al. 2017)	BH, NP

Table 1. Additions to the birds of South Asia over 'The Ripley Guide'

No.	Species	Status in BSA2	Evidence	Status	Country
39	Tristram's Bunting <i>Emberiza tristrami</i>	Possible	Media	Presumably a rare passage migrant through the eastern Indian Subcontinent (Naniwadekar et al. 2013; Khan 2016; Thangaraj & Mani 2016)	IN, BD
40	Yellow-browed Bunting <i>Emberiza chrysophrys</i>	Not included	Media	Vagrant. One photographed in southern West Bengal (Kundu & Abhinav 2018)	IN
41	Lapland Longspur <i>Calcarius lapponicus</i>	Not included	Media	Vagrant. One photographed in Bhutan (Chophel & Sherub 2016)	BH
42	Sedge Warbler <i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>	Hypothetical	In hand	Vagrant or rare passage migrant through the Ladakh Valley (Delany et al. 2014). Considered hypothetical by Rasmussen & Anderton (2012), but accepted subsequently based on morphometrics and photographs (Praveen et al. 2017)	IN
43	Wood Warbler <i>Phylloscopus sibilatrix</i>	Not included	Media	Vagrant. One bird photographed on adjacent days in south-eastern Ladakh (Bengtsson et al. 2016; Kang et al. 2016)	IN
44	Asian Stubtail <i>Urosphena squameiceps</i>	Hypothetical	Media	Rare winter visitor to the eastern Indian Subcontinent (Gassah & Ismavel 2019)	IN, BD, NP
45	Black-headed Greenfinch <i>Carduelis ambigua</i>	Hypothetical	Media	Resident and probably breeding in north-eastern Arunachal Pradesh (Dalvi 2013; Singh 2013; Sharma et al. 2014)	IN
46	Garden Warbler <i>Sylvia borin</i>	Hypothetical	In hand	Vagrant or rare passage migrant through the Ladakh Valley (Delany et al. 2014; Singh 2017)	IN
47	Elliot's Laughingthrush <i>Trochalopteron elliotii</i>	Hypothetical	Sight record	Probably a rare resident in extreme north-eastern India. Accepted based on a sight record (Dalvi 2013) and the field notes of the same published on eBird (Dalvi 2012)	IN
48	Yunnan Nuthatch <i>Sitta yunnanensis</i>	Possible	Media	Year-round, and presumably breeding, in the Upper Lohit Valley of north-eastern Arunachal Pradesh (Bonpo & Kuriakose 2014)	IN
49	White-cheeked Starling <i>Spodiopsar cineraceus</i>	Possible	Media	Vagrant. Two photographic records from Arunachal Pradesh (Hatibaruah et al. 2017; Maheswaran 2018)	IN
50	Zappey's Flycatcher <i>Cyanoptila cumatilis</i>	Not included	Media	Vagrant. Photographed in the Great Nicobar Island (Gokulakrishnan et al. 2018)	IN
51	Mugimaki Flycatcher <i>Ficedula mugimaki</i>	Not included	Media	Vagrant or rare passage migrant through the Andaman Islands (Das 2014; Singh 2017)	IN
52	Whinchat <i>Saxicola rubetra</i>	Hypothetical	Media	Vagrant. Photographed in Sri Lanka (Steiof et al. 2017)	SL
53	Chinese Thrush <i>Otocichla mupinensis</i>	Rejected	Media	Vagrant. Photographed in north-eastern Arunachal Pradesh (Rajagopal & Inskipp 2014)	IN
54	Fieldfare <i>Turdus pilaris</i>	Hypothetical	Media	Vagrant. Photographed on the northern Bengal-Sikkim border (Banerjee & Inskipp 2013)	IN
55	Naumann's Thrush <i>Turdus naumanni</i>	Not included	Media	Hybrids with Dusky Thrush are winter visitors to the Eastern Himalayas (Dalvi et al. 2017) while the pure form is extremely rare, possibly only vagrants. One pure form photographed from western Arunachal Pradesh (Hatibaruah et al. 2019)	IN, BH

Shearwater *Calonectris borealis*, and Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus*); two by in-hand photographs, descriptions, and morphometrics (Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*, and Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin*); and 46 by media (sonograms, images and/or videos). Five species—Sooty Shearwater *Ardenna grisea*, Franklin's Gull *Leucophaeus pipixcan*, Red Kite *Milvus milvus*, Three-banded Rosefinch *Carpodacus trifasciatus*, and Elliot's Laughingthrush *Trochalopteron elliotii*—are accepted purely based on field descriptions of sight records. BSA2 accepted very few species purely on the basis of sight records and the Crested Tit Warbler *Leptopoecile elegans* remains the only one that has still not been substantiated by a specimen or media, or analysed in hand (Praveen et al. 2016a; Praveen et al. 2017).

The provenance of six species in the Table has been discussed earlier and we base their inclusion on that (Carr 2015; Praveen et al. 2019a). Though the records of Cape Petrel *Daption capense*, from the region, were previously accepted

(Rasmussen & Anderton 2012; Praveen et al. 2016a), they were revisited and their provenance could not be established (Praveen et al. 2019a) and we follow the same treatment here. 28 of the new species (59%) were already listed as 'Hypothetical' in BSA2 and an additional five species were listed as 'Possible', indicating that the birders had access to relevant material for their identification and these species were on the radar of our bird-watchers. One species, the Chinese Thrush *Otocichla mupinensis*, was listed under rejected species (a suspected Meinertzhagen fraud!), while 21 (38%) were not included in the book. Five of the additions have come exclusively from BIOT, three from Bhutan (Three-banded Rosefinch, Rustic Bunting *Emberiza rustica*, and Lapland Longspur *Calcarius lapponicus*), two from the Maldives (Sooty Shearwater and Abbott's Booby *Papasula abbotti*), and one from Sri Lanka (Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra*)—while the others have occurred in India.

This update takes the consolidated list of birds of South Asia to 1412, while the same for the Indian Subcontinent is 1392 (Praveen et al. 2019d) and for India is 1317 (Praveen et al. 2019c).

Acknowledgements

We would like to gratefully acknowledge the help rendered by Aasheesh Pittie in preparation of this note and to the three anonymous referees for their critical comments.

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Status of Blue-cheeked Bee-eater *Merops persicus* in south-western India

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Gosavi, P, Mannar, H., Sumesh, P. B., Vinay, K. L., & Saleem, M., 2019. Status of Blue-cheeked Bee-eater *Merops persicus* in south-western India. *Indian BIRDS* 15 (4): 117–119.

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Manuscript received on 23 April 2019.

The Blue-cheeked Bee-eater *Merops persicus* is a well-known passage migrant / winter visitor to the northern and north-western Indian Subcontinent (Ali & Ripley 1987; Grimmett et al. 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). However, post-2015 there are an increasing number of sightings from southern India as well, which have been reported by eBirders from the states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Goa (eBird 2019). This paper aims to collate these sightings in a wider perspective of vagrancy, local migration, or resident status with a focus on seasonal sightings.

The first report of this species, from anywhere in southern India, was by Paul Holt, who reported it from Goa in November 2007 (Holt 2009). In April 2013, P. P. Sreenivasan photographed it at Kole Wetlands, Malappuram, Kerala (Sreenivasan 2013); both records were during the autumn/spring passage, and hence, considered as vagrant; off the main migration route through the Arabian Sea. However, this status has since changed and we compile sightings from published literature and eBird to update its status.

State-wise summary

Kerala: After Sreenivasan's first report in 2013, SPB and others first observed the bird at Changaram wetlands in April 2014 (George 2014); since then the species has been observed

almost every month till date in that general area (Mannar & Sumesh 2016; eBird 2019). HM & SPB have documented it attempting to breed [158] at that site (Mannar & Sumesh 2015), though in subsequent years, they were not able to provide any more breeding evidence. Retrospectively, the first report from Kerala was also from Changaram on 10 March 2012 [159] by Jinu Muraleedharan (Birders Ezhupunna 2012), and predates Sreenivasan (2013) and we take this opportunity to put that on record.



Jinu Muraleedharan

159. Blue-cheeked Bee-eater from Changaram in March 2012, first report from Kerala.



Harikumar Mannar

158. Attempted nesting of Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters from Changaram wetlands.

Apart from Changaram, it has also occurred consistently around the Upper Kuttanad wetlands, situated in the southern part of Alappuzha District, since November 2017. Records of its presence in that area span all months except during the peak monsoon (May–August). Apart from these two areas, it has also occurred, since then, in the districts of Malappuram, Thrissur, Ernakulam (parts adjoining Alappuzha District), Kottayam, Kollam, and Thiruvananthapuram (Table 1). It has not yet been reported from the coastal districts of northern Kerala (Kozhikode, Kannur, and Kasaragod).

Tamil Nadu: The only recorded occurrence is from Coimbatore [160], in April 2018 by MS (Table 1). However, a record in spring from anywhere in southern India is not exceptional.



160. Blue-cheeked Bee-eater from Achankulam, Coimbatore in April 2018.

Table 1. Sightings post 2015 from southern India excluding areas around Changaram and Upper Kuttanad wetlands in Alappuzha district, Kerala

No	Site	State	Month	Year	Observer*	# Birds	eBird checklist
1	Ezhumaanthuruthu, Kottayam	Kerala	April	2015	PJG	5	S22626787
2	Punchakari, Thiruvananthapuram	Kerala	June	2015	NA	4	S24264548
3	Pallipuram, Alappuzha	Kerala	May	2016	RTR	5	S30173406
4	Kandakkvaddu, Ernakulam	Kerala	June	2016	SPB	4	S30238887
5	Punchakari, Thiruvananthapuram	Kerala	June	2016	JJ	2	S30809347
6	Chellanam, Erankulam	Kerala	July	2016	SPB	2	S30789424
7	Paravur, Kollam	Kerala	July	2017	HB	3	S38199040
8	Achankulam, Coimbatore	Tamil Nadu	April	2018	MS	2	S44141832
9	Kenjar, Dakshin Kannada	Karnataka	May	2018	VKL	1	S46026837
10	Mariyamthuruthu, Kottayam	Kerala	July	2018	RA	5	S47535551
11	Kenjar, Dakshin Kannada	Karnataka	July	2018	VKL	1	S47289824
12	Chitrapu Dakshin Kannada	Karnataka	July	2018	VKL	2	S47418907
13	Barkur, Udupi	Karnataka	July	2018	RS	5	S47269717
14	Dhado, North Goa	Goa	July	2018	PG	2	S47182280
15	Kanasagiri, Uttar Kannada	Karnataka	November	2018	RR	8	S49880802
16	Kandakkvaddu, Ernakulam	Kerala	November	2018	RP	8	S49638691
17	Kesthur, Charmrajnagar	Karnataka	January	2019	PM	5	S51694724
18	Thommana Kole, Thrissur	Kerala	May	2019	RK	1	S56162795

* HB: Hari Bharathan, JJ: Jaichand Johnson, NA: Nitin Agarwal, PM: Pallavi M, PJG: PJ George, RS: Ramit Singal, RK: Raphy Kalletumkara, RA: Robin Antony, RR: Rohidas Revankar, RTR: Renju TR, TB: Tubin Babu.

Karnataka: VKL reported it first from Dakshin Kannada in May 2018 [161], and it has been reported on three occasions from different wetlands in Dakshin Kannada and Udupi districts in July 2018. Apart from that, there is a November 2018 report from Uttar Kannada and a January 2019 report from the inland district of Charamarajnagar (Table 1).



Vinay KL

161. Blue-cheeked Bee-eater from Kenjar Wetlands, Daskhin Kannada in May 2018.

Goa: After a gap of 11 years, PG reported two individuals [162] in North Goa District in July 2018. This is the only report in recent years from the state.



Pareesh Gosavi

162. Blue-cheeked Bee-eater from Dhado wetlands, North Goa in July 2018.

It has occurred, till date, in nine (of the 15) coastal districts along the south-western coast of India, except South Goa, Kasaragod, Kannur, Kozhikode, Malappuram, and Kanyakumari (Fig. 1).

Discussion

Both, Kerala, and Goa have been well birded in patches by resident and visiting birders—particularly in winter, and sporadically during the monsoon. Information on migration was available even before 2010 (Lainer 2004; Sashikumar et al. 2011). However, Blue-cheeked Bee-eater can be easily confused with a Blue-tailed Bee-eater *M. philippinus*—hence, there is a high chance it could have been overlooked between August and April.

Most Blue-tailed Bee-eaters emigrate from south-western India during late summer/monsoon, except for small, well-known, breeding colonies like the one in Kasaragod District (Sashikumar et al. 2011). Hence, during the monsoon season, any large bee-eater with pins on its central rectrices would have alerted birders. An alternate explanation could be that the Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters were highly localized during the pre-2015 monsoon season and the lack of birding in areas like Changaram could be the reason for a lack of reports.

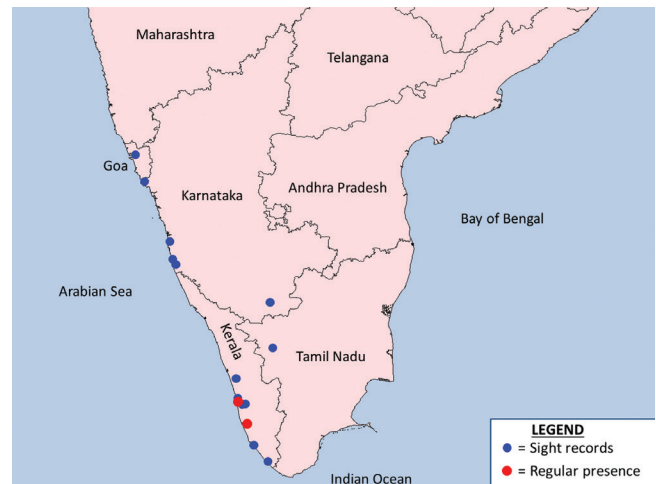


Fig. 1. Blue-cheeked Bee-eater reports from south-western India. Map: S. Subramanya

Either way, multiple reports from several south-western coastal districts, from Goa till Thiruvananthapuram, during the monsoon establishes the fact that the species' status has changed in recent years. The bird is probably nomadic during the monsoon, visiting various wetlands for short durations. It's attempted breeding, and year-round status in and around the Changaram wetlands establishes that it is resident at least there; and probably breeding. Though it is hard to establish with certainty, circumstances indicate that the population of Changaram wetlands might have dispersed northwards and southwards, and might be the source for the recent monsoon reports. Further reports, in the years to come, will clarify the residential status of this bird in south-western India. Cataloguing sightings on eBird will help to establish status and open up new avenues to understand the species and throw more light on its migration pattern.

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Correspondence

Painted Spurfowl from the Chota Nagpur Plateau area of West Bengal

The Painted Spurfowl *Galloperdix lunulata* inhabits rocky slopes and scrub habitats of dry forests, from central to southern India, including the Aravalli Range of Rajasthan up to the Ayodhya Range of West Bengal (Ball 1874). Historically, it was recorded at Rajmahal Hill, Manbhum, Lohardaga, Sirguja, Jashpur, Udaipur, Sambalpur, northwards of Mahanadi, Raipur, Nowagarh, Karial, and along the Godavari Valley (Ball 1874, 1878) on the Chotanagpur Plateau. But there is no record of the species (Chakraborty 2011) from a large portion of this important ecogeographic region (Kumar & Rawat 2008). We report the presence of this species in the Chotanagpur region on the basis of several sight records supported by photographs taken on three occasions [163].



163. Male Painted Spurfowl.

Ayan Mondal and Anirban Patra first saw the bird in the Matha forest, Purulia District on 16 April 2013. AP and Anirban Patra photographed a bird on 15 November 2015 in the Jhilimili forest (22.84°N, 86.71°E). Subsequently, SS and Kirty Kumar photographed a cock on 05 February 2019 on Ajodhya Hill (23.20°N, 86.07°E). DS and SM saw a pair on 28 April 2019 on the outskirts of Bishnupur town (23.03°E, 87.29°N). This was typical plateau habitat (Fig. 1), with its characteristic red soil and mounds of granite rock, with scarce vegetation like date palm, sal, palas, eucalyptus, etc. We did not see a waterbody.

According to Grimm et al. (2011), although this bird is found on the Chotanagpur Plateau, there have not been any reports from its portion that extends into West Bengal. Hence, our reports probably constitute the eastern most population of this species.

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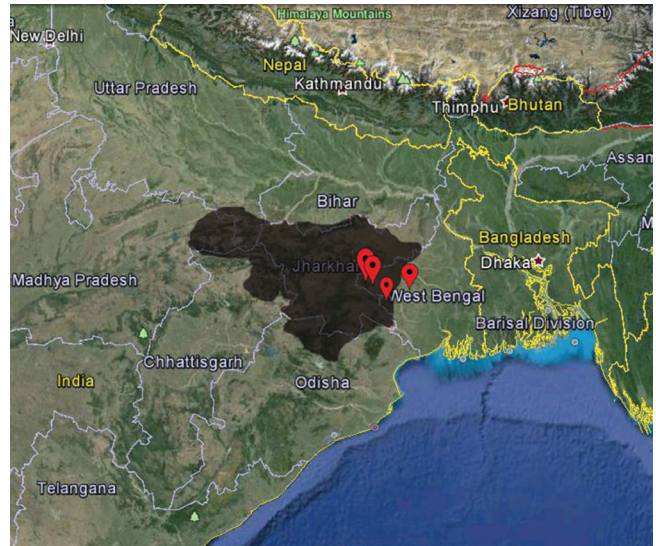


Fig. 1. Location of the sighting of Painted Spurfowl.

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A leucistic Brown Crake *Zapornia akool* in Karnataka

On the morning of 11 July 2019, while birding with Shyam Hirurkar, we spotted a pair of Brown Crake *Zapornia akool* [164] in Somapur Village (15.444°N, 75.0824°E), Dharwad District, Karnataka. The road we were driving along had a little water channel running parallel to it. We saw a blob of white along the edge of the channel, and initially thought it was domesticated rock pigeon. But as we got closer, it was clear that it was something else. The brown bird followed the partially white one, and we instantly recognised it as a Brown Crake, given its characteristic olive-brown upperparts and greyish face, breast, and belly (Grimmett et al. 2011). The other bird, which accompanied it, was a colour aberrant Brown Crake as parts of its body were white and the rest of it retained the inherent brown colour [165].

A closer examination of the bird in the photographs revealed that it was a partially leucistic individual, as the pattern of white plumage on the bird is bilaterally symmetric and patchy, ruling out any other form of colour aberrations (van Grouw 2013). This is the first record of a leucistic Brown Crake in South Asia (Mahabal et al. 2016).



164. Aberrant plumaged Brown Crane.



165. Leucistic Brown Crane.

Both: Hemanth Byatroy

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Alloparental care by Red-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer* in central India

Alloparental care, also known as foster parental care, cross species feeding, or interspecific feeding is the least documented phenomenon of animal behaviour in South Asian ornithology. We could locate just two instances of this behaviour in published literature: that of an Indian White-eye *Zosterops palpebrosus* feeding Indian Paradise Flycatcher *Terpsiphone paradisi* nestlings (Tehsin & Tehsin 1998), and a Red-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer* feeding Black Drongo *Dicrurus macrocercus* chicks (Gruisen 2004).

On 06 May 2018, during our stay at Bhedaghat, Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh, we observed an active nest of an Indian Robin *Copsychus fulicatus* with two altricial nestlings. The nest was constructed in KA's grandma's garage (23.13°N, 79.79°E). It was built in a gap between two bricks, was 2.43m above ground, [166], and was lined with grass, twigs, jute rope, and pieces of synthetic fiber.



166. Nest of Indian Robin.

We observed that both parents were engaged in feeding nestlings from the early hours of the day [167]. However, a Red-vented Bulbul was also been spotted feeding chicks repeatedly [168]. The bulbul fed the chicks more frequently than the biological parents, who seemed unconcerned with this interspecific feeding. The alloparent not only fed the chicks, but also cleaned fecal matter from the nest. Some of the morsels the bulbul fed the chicks were identified as Lynx spider *Oxypes* sp., and various other arthropoda *Coptotermes kishori*, *Peromyia indica*, and *Polypedilum (Pentapedilum) robusticeps*. The present observation is noteworthy because alloparenting is much confused with brood parasitism, but is more likely the rarer phenomena wherein young ones are parented by heterospecific species in the presence, or absence, of biological parents.



167. Female Indian Robin feeding chicks.



168. Red-vented Bulbul feeding Indian Robin chicks.

We thank Shaheen Bano (Govt. Primary School, Jamuniya, Mankedi, Belkheda) for informing us about the nesting activity, and the wonderful home stay at Bhedaghat; and Saipari Sailo and Pratyush Mohapatra (CZRC, Zoological Survey of India, Jabalpur) for their comments and support during the preparation of the manuscript. We also acknowledge Praveen Jayadevan (*IndianBirds*) for reviewing an earlier version of this manuscript.

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Black-eared Kite *Milvus migrans lineatus*, Common Rosefinch *Carpodacus erythrinus*, and Small Pratincole *Glareola lactea*: Additions to the Birds of Andaman & Nicobar Islands

The following birds were reported as additions to the birds of the Andaman & Nicobar Islands in 2018–2019.

Black-eared Kite *Milvus migrans lineatus*

On 04 November 2018, between 1334 h and 1343 h, GK spotted and photographed a Black Kite *Milvus migrans* [169] at the forest's edge at Shastri Nagar (06.78°N, 93.88°E), in Great Nicobar Island. On 07 November 2018, he again photographed the raptor, as it struggled with prey, at Laxmi Nagar (06°50'N, 93°53'E). The photograph with a dorsal view of the bird was taken at Magar Nallah (06°59'N, 93°54'E), on 29 November 2018 [170]. Once again, it was seen foraging on the side of the road at Gandhi Nagar (07°00'N, 93°54'E), on 02 December 2018. The bird had a conspicuous dark facial mask, white patches on the bases of under primaries, and a noticeably lighter (cream-coloured) vent than the darker breast/upper chest—all features of a Black-eared Kite *Milvus migrans lineatus*.



169. Black Kite at Shastri Nagar, Great Nicobar Island.



170. Black Kite at Magar Nallah, Great Nicobar Island.

Both: Gokulkrishnan G

However, one could confuse it with a juvenile Black Kite *M. m. govinda*—but the following features were unique to our bird.

- The vent was comparatively lighter than the breast.
- The whitish patch at the beginning of the retrices was larger than that on a Black Kite.
- The ventral streaky pattern had thicker streaks than those on a juvenile Black Kite.

The Black-eared Kite is, reportedly, a migratory race of the Black Kite, visiting South Asia during winter. It has been recurrently sighted migrating each October, flying southward of Thailand and also westward to Nepal, visiting Central- and East Asia, and southwards to the Himalayas and northern Indochina (Decandido et al. 2013). Ali & Ripley (1983), Grimmett et al. (2011), Rasmussen & Anderton (2012), and Sivaperuman et al. (2018) have not mentioned any sightings of this species from the Andaman & Nicobar Islands.

Common Rosefinch *Carpodacus erythrinus*

On 18 January 2019, a Common Rosefinch was first seen feeding on a *Ficus* sp., tree at Hut Bay (10.58°N, 92.53°E) in Little Andaman. It had brownish upperparts with a whitish throat and underparts, visibly darker streaking on crown, mantle, lower throat, breast, upper belly, and flanks, and two narrow whitish wing-bars [171]. It is a regular winter migrant across much of

peninsular India (Grimmett et al. 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012; eBird 2019). This species is a common winter visitor to Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, and Tonkin (Robson 2008).



171. Common Rosefinch.

Small Pratincole *Glareola lactea*

At 0745 h, on 12 January 2019, while surveying at Sippighat (11.6°N, 92.68°E), South Andaman, AS spotted one Pratincole. It showed greyish on its dorsal side, a pale buff grey breast, and black lores, which enabled us to identify it as a Small Pratincole [172]. This would be the first record of the species the Islands. Others also reported it this year, during the same month, from Sippighat (Balaji 2019).



Both: Gokulakrishnan G

172. Small Pratincole.

Acknowledgments

The authors are grateful to Kailash Chandra, Director, Zoological Survey of India. We thank the DFO, Great Nicobar Island, for allowing us to carry out the field survey on Great Nicobar Island. GK would also like to thank Praveen J for providing suggestions for this manuscript.

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Siberian Blue Robin *Larvivora cyane* from the Barak Valley of Assam with a status update for India

The Siberian Blue Robin *Larvivora cyane* is a migratory insectivorous Old-World Flycatcher, of the Muscicapidae family. This species breeds in north-eastern Asia, mainly Russia and Japan, and winters in South-east Asia, mainly Malaysia, Borneo, and Thailand. It is a rare vagrant to India.

On 06 February 2019, RG visited the Badsaitilla Reserve Forest, a two-hour walk from Dosdewa village in Karimganj District of Assam, to document its biodiversity, along with members of the Makunda Nature Club. At 1648 h he observed a small brown bird, with blue tinged brown wings, hopping on the ground near a pool of water. Two photographs were taken [173, 174] and posted to the Facebook group, 'Ask IDs of Indian Birds' and a suggestion obtained that the bird was a Siberian Blue Robin *Larvivora cyane*—it was presumed to be a first winter male. On the 21 February 2019, RG visited the same spot (24.33°N, 92.35°E) and waited for the birds in a hide created near the small pool of water. At 1653 h, two small birds arrived. One of them had slate-blue colour from crown to tail with black coloration extending from neck to flanks and white from chin to vent, black bill, pinkish lower mandible and pinkish feet and the other. The other bird was brown on the dorsum from crown to tail with prominent bluish tinge noted over the face, wings and dorsum of the tail – they were presumed to be adult and first winter male Siberian Blue Robins. At 1730, another bird with brown coloration from crown to rump and tail with white abdomen to vent and with some scaling in the chest, black beak and pinkish legs was noted and was presumed to be a female. All the birds exhibited similar behavior, hopping on the ground with rapid wagging of their tails and took dips in the pool of water. Several photographs were taken of the males (the female could not be photographed) till the light became too low for photography.

Although a rare winter vagrant to India, this species has been documented in the recent past (post 2010) only from

Both: Rejoice Gassah



173. Adult Siberian Blue Robin.

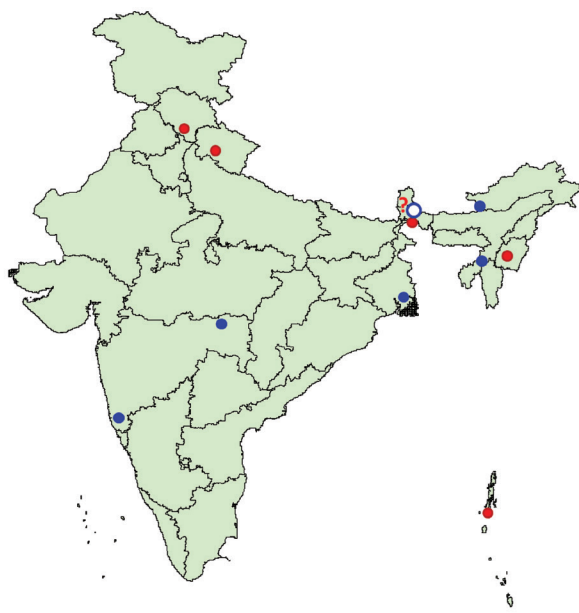


174. Siberian Blue Robin first winter male.

Table 1. Siberian Blue Robin reports from India

Month	Year	Observer	Location	State	Reference	Evidence	Remarks
Undated	< 1881	Capt Stackhouse Pinwill	Shimla	Himachal Pradesh	Seebohm (1881)	Specimen	Ali & Ripley (1987) felt this male was erroneously labelled as 'Simla', but Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) consider this of acceptable provenience
April	1881	A.O.Hume	Aimole	Manipur	Hume (1888)	Specimen	A male shot from a party of several birds. Specimen probably in NHM, London
February	1932	C M Inglis	Haldibari Dooars	West Bengal	Ali & Ripley (1987)	Specimen	In NHM London, probably the same is referred to as "W. Assam" in Rasmussen & Anderton (2012)
February	1980	Salim Ali	South Andaman	A & N Islands	Ali & Ripley (1987)	Specimen	A female in the Bombay Natural History Society Collection.
May	1996	Suchitra Ghosh	Pauri Garhwal	Uttarakhand	Ghosh (1998)	Observation	A male well-described; record accepted by Rasmussen & Anderton (2012)
October	1997	S. J. Ghosh	Kalimpong	West Bengal	Ghose (1999)	Observation	A male, but not described; and subsequently more (forty) seen. While the first record could have been correct, subsequent birds were most likely of another species
May	2000	Anwaruddin Chowdhury	Eaglenest Wildlife Sanctuary	Arunachal Pradesh	Choudhury (2003)	Observation	A male, well-described; record accepted by Rasmussen & Anderton (2012)
April–May	2008	Parag Deshmukh	Nagpur	Maharashtra	Deshmukh (2011)	Photograph	A male stayed at the same site for three weeks
February–March	2014	Banerjee AK, Anupam Mistry, Amitava Basu, HIRAK SARKAR, etc.	Gorumara-Chapramari	West Bengal	Mistry (2014)	Photograph	1st winter male reported by many birders
December	2014	Amitava Basu, Biswapriya Rahut	Gorumara-Chapramari	West Bengal	Basu (2014)	Photograph	Adult male
April	2016	Hirak Sarkar	Gorumara-Chapramari	West Bengal	Sarkar (2018)	Photograph	1st winter male
October	2016	Rajib Das, Amit Adak, Arnab Pal, etc.	Rabindra Sarovar, Kolkata	West Bengal	Pal (2016)	Photograph	1st winter male reported by many birders
January	2017	Satish Jadhav	Dajipur Wildlife Sanctuary, Kolhapur	Maharashtra	Jadhav (2017)	Photograph	Adult male
January–February	2017	Mousumi Dutta, Biswapriya Rahut, Jyotirmoy Deb, Amitava Basu, Arup Banerjee, Debapratim Saha, etc.	Gorumara-Chapramari	West Bengal	Dutta (2017)	Photograph	1st winter male reported by many birders. Assumed to be the same bird though, possibly, more individuals may have been involved
February–March	2018	Biswapriya Rahut	Gorumara-Chapramari	West Bengal	B. Rahut, <i>in litt.</i> , e-mail dated 18 August 2019	Observation	1st winter male reported twice from the same site
February	2019	Rejoice Gassah	Badsaitilla RF	Assam	This work	Photograph	An adult male, a first winter male, and, probably, a female

locations in Maharashtra and West Bengal but surprisingly, not from northeast India. Online sites such as OBI, eBird, Xeno-canto, and IBC, and Facebook groups such as “Ask IDs of Indian Birds” “Birds of Eastern India”, and “Indian Birds” were searched and previously documented records of observations from India are recorded in Table 1.



S. Subramanya

Fig. 1. Records of Siberian Blue Robin from India. Red dots indicate records before 2000, blue dots, after. Circle indicates Gorumara National Park-Chapramari Wildlife Sanctuary complex with repeat records. Map prepared before 31 October 2019, after: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jammu_and_Kashmir_Reorganisation_Act,_2019.

As can be seen from the records (Table 1; Fig. 1), the species has been reported from the western Himalayas (twice), Maharashtra (twice), the Andaman Islands (once), north-eastern India (thrice), and West Bengal (seven times) – with repeat sightings in all years from Gorumara National Park-Chapramari Wildlife Sanctuary complex between 2014–2015 and 2017–2018. The most favoured spot in this area is from a tiny waterhole formed by a drying monsoon stream in Murti Forest (Biswapriya Rahut *in litt.*, in e-mail dated 18 August 2019). Chats generally age within a year and hence repeated sightings of first winter birds in successive years would mean these are different individuals. Considering the historical report by Inglis was also from the same general area (Haldibari Dooars), this region in north Bengal might have more birds wintering every year. Our current record from Barak valley is also not surprising as recent records from the eastern Bangladesh have also been from the same landscape (Mohsanin et al. 2014). Hence, Siberian Blue Robin can be considered a scarce winter visitor to India - with most records clustered in February-March – and sporadic records in October, December-January and April-May.

We thank the Makunda Christian Hospital, which runs the Makunda Nature Club, for the use of camera and GPS device used in this observation and to Biswapriya Rahut for providing his insights on northern Bengal records.

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Status of the Asian Desert Warbler *Sylvia nana* in Uttarakhand, India

The Asian Desert Warbler *Sylvia nana* is a small warbler with ‘skulking habit, pale coloration, yellow legs, yellow iris, and yellow on bill’ (Parmentar & Byers 1991); a pale rufous rump and tail, white outer rectrices, and whitish underparts (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). The bird’s plumage, its horizontal carriage, and slow, hopping movements on the ground distinguish it from its congeners. The species breeds from the northern and eastern

coasts of the Caspian Sea and north-eastern Iran, eastwards to central, and southern Mongolia and north-western China. Until recently, it was considered conspecific with the African Desert Warbler *S. deserti*. The Asian Desert Warbler is a long-distance migrant, with a non-breeding range extending from north-eastern Africa and southern Israel, eastwards to southern and eastern Iran and north-western India (Aymi & Gargalio 2018). 'On passage and in winter, found in flat semi-desert or mudflat regions with dwarf saline-loving bushes, broad sandy or boulder-strewn desert and sandy hillsides ... Solitary in winter' (Baker 1997).

The Asian Desert Warbler has a handful of records from Uttarakhand. On 22 January 2017 at c.1315 h, MS photographed a drab looking bird with a prominent yellow eye and rufous colouration to its rump and tail at Tumaria Reservoir (29.30°N, 78.91°E; c.259m asl). The bird was seen for upto five minutes. It was feeding on the boulders of the slope of the reservoir, frequently disappearing behind them and the short dry vegetation. On 10 October 2008, SS had recorded a bird in a shrubbery and foraging on the ground in Lansdowne Reserve Forest about two kilometers from Saneh Forest Resthouse (29.69°N, 78.53°E; c.320m asl), towards Kohlu Chaur.

The status of this species is unclear, from Uttarakhand, in the older literature. Ali & Ripley (1981) stated that it is a winter visitor, listing its range as 'northwestern India in Haryana, Rajasthan and Kutch', with no mention of Uttarakhand. Baker (1997) included 'northwestern India' in its distribution. Grimmett et al. (2011) showed a spot record from Uttarakhand while Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) stated the same distribution as mentioned by Ali & Ripley (1981). Mohan & Sondhi (2017) included the species in their Uttarakhand bird checklist, based on some of the records that we have included in Table 1.

The first record of the species from Uttarakhand is held by Seb Buckton, who saw a bird on the scrubby slopes at Budyakot (=Budyakot, Bageshwar District, Uttarakhand; 30.11°N, 79.85°E; c.1980 m asl; Buckton 1995; Tim Inskipp *pers comm.*, e-mail dated 29 March 2019). This shows up as a dot in the maps of Grimmett et al. (2011). Thereafter, there have been five records between 2008 and 2017 (Table 1, Fig. 1).

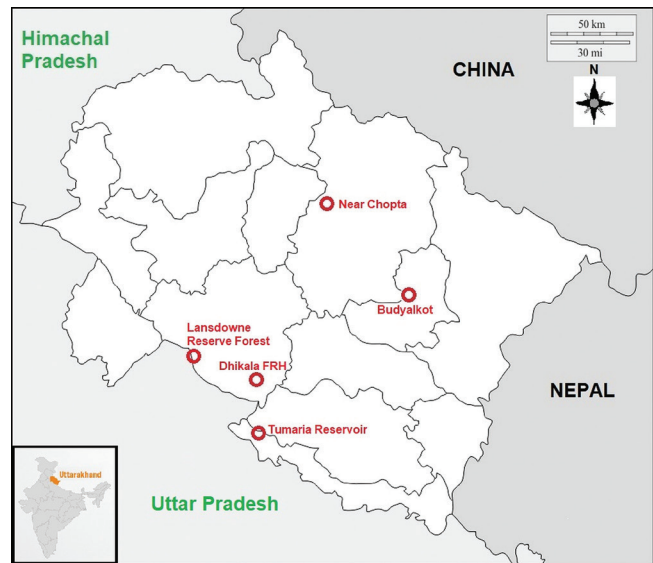


Fig. 1. Asian Desert Warbler records from Uttarakhand, India.

The species appears to be a vagrant in Uttarakhand, or probably an autumn passage migrant in very small numbers, as most of the records from the state are from October–November. It is possible that the bird seen on 22 January 2017 at Tumaria Reservoir was either lost, wintering in the area, or an early individual on return migration.

Acknowledgements

We thank Samir Ovalekar and Praveen J. for pointing out older records of the species from Uttarakhand, Peter Jones, Devender Singh Negi and Yashpal Negi for sharing the details of their records, and Tim Inskipp for shining a light on Seb Buckton's (almost) lost record.

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Table 1. Asian Desert Warbler *Sylvia n. nana* records from Uttarakhand, India

Date	Location	Observation	Observer	Reference
16 October 1995	Budyakot	One bird observed on scrubby slopes was the first record for the state of Uttarakhand	Seb Buckton	See text
10 October 2008	Lansdowne Reserve Forest	One bird observed in shrubbery, and foraging on the ground	Sanjay Sondhi	
17 November 2010	Dhikala Forest Resthouse, Corbett Tiger Reserve (29.59°N, 78.86°E; c.375m asl)	One bird photographed in the grounds of the Forest Resthouse campus, near the grassland was the first record for Corbett Tiger Reserve	Peter Jones	Jones 2010; Peter Jones <i>pers. comm.</i> , message dated 07 June 2013
19-20 November 2015	Near Chopta (30.35°N, 79.04°E; c.1550m asl)	Virag Sharma photographed a single bird near Chopta on 19 November 2015 Yashpal Negi saw the same bird on 20 November 2015, in the same area (Yashpal Negi, <i>pers comm.</i> , message dated 19 January 2019)	Virag Sharma & Yashpal Negi	Sharma 2015a; Sharma 2015b
October/November 2016	Tumaria Reservoir (29.31°N, 78.93°E; c.257m asl)	A bird observed at Tumaria Reservoir, located on the southern boundary of Corbett Tiger Reserve, and described as 'having overall drab coloration, small size, yellow iris, bill and legs and rufous in the tail', by an experienced bird guide from Corbett Tiger Reserve	Devender Singh Negi	Devinder Singh Negi, <i>verbally</i> , dated 15 December 2016
22 January 2017	Tumaria Reservoir	One bird photographed	Manoj Sharma	

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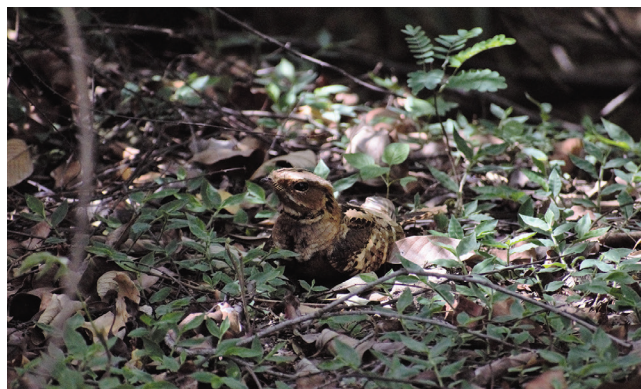
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Large-tailed Nightjar *Caprimulgus macrurus* from Jammu & Kashmir, India

On 28 April 2019, at 1330 h, two of us (PC and AK) went to Chowki-Choura (32.94°N, 74.60°E), 52 kms north-westwards of Jammu, in Jammu & Kashmir, for bird photography. We were searching for birds along the banks of a small stream. The area had big rocks, dense mixed vegetation with coniferous as well as deciduous trees, some shrubs, and epiphytes. Suddenly two birds flushed from the litter of leaves and one of them provided me an opportunity to click a photograph [175]. Later we identified it as a Large-tailed Nightjar *Caprimulgus macrurus* after finding characters like, long tail, black and gold scapular stripes, white throat patches, barred breast, and pale bars on wing coverts (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012; Grimmett et al. 2011). On 30 April 2019 PC and AK, along with Parmil Kumar and Parvez Shagoo, again visited the same spot at 0600 h and once again found a pair of nightjars. This time the birds' vocalizations confirmed their identity.

There is a paucity of information on the status of all nightjar species in Jammu & Kashmir with very few confirmed records within the region. According to Stoliczka (1868), the *Grey Nightjar C. jotaka* was often observed on the road from Simla towards Suket near Kotegurh (the village at the base of Kalkaand, the military posts of Kasauli), in company with the smaller Common Indian Nightjar *C. asiaticus*; whose specimen had been procured from Kishtwar and its extreme boundaries (Ward 1907). As per Ward (1907), Sykes's Nightjar *C. mahattensis* was expected in the plains below the Pir Panjal range, but he provided no evidence. Specimens of the European Nightjar *C. europaeus* from Gilgit had been deposited in the Natural History Museum, London, however, there were no sightings from the Kashmir Valley (Ward 1907). The Jungle Nightjar *C. indicus* was expected to be confined to Poonch, and Jammu, according to Ward (1907), while Grimmett



175. Large-tailed Nightjar.

et al. (2011) map a small, isolated area on the south-eastern border with Pakistan as its summer migration range. The Savanna Nightjar *C. affinis* is a possible species in Jammu & Kashmir with its occurrence close to the borders with Pakistan, Himachal Pradesh, and Punjab (Grimmett et al. 2011). The mythical Vaurie's Nightjar *C. centralasicus* was collected just north of Jammu & Kashmir (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012).

As far as the Large-tailed Nightjar is concerned, Bates (1936) mentioned its presence in the Kishenganga Valley. He recorded four individuals at Pateka Forest Reserve in erstwhile, undivided Jammu & Kashmir (presently, Pakistan occupied Kashmir). Hugh Whistler suggested (*in* Bates 1936) that Bates' records were of the Jungle Nightjar; however, Grimmett et al. (2011) seem to accept the Bates record. Our present photographic record establishes its presence within Jammu & Kashmir.

Acknowledgements

We thank Gurpartap Singh, Parmil Kumar, and Parvez Shagoo for their contribution in identification of the species.

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White-bellied Sholakili *Sholicola albiventris* feeding on a shieldtail snake *Uropeltidae* sp.

On 28 June 2018, at 0711 h, while birding at the IISER Tirupati-Kodaikanal International School field station campus (10.23°N, 77.49°E) near Bombay Shola, Kodaikanal, we made a curious observation. We would usually see a White-bellied Sholakili *Sholicola albiventris* near a thicket. On that day it was perched on a small bush, and all of a sudden it came down onto the ground

as if looking for some prey. Through binoculars, it appeared to have caught a small snake (shieldtail sp.), c.15 cm long in its beak. The bird dropped the snake in an open patch over the leaf litter [176] and was repeatedly smashing and shaking that snake on the ground. The snake tried to escape, but after some time, it stopped moving and the bird picked it and went into the bush. From the observations, we think that the snake was perhaps a juvenile shieldtail: Small in size, black in colour, with a yellowish belly—we have encountered this species frequently, road-kill victim, in and around Bombay Shola [177].



176. White-bellied Sholakili with snake on open ground.

and other invertebrates". VJ has observed it feeding on newly hatched nymphs of cicadas [178], while RVV and Vishnudas C. K. (Vishnudas C. K., *pers. comm.*, dated 08 October 2018) have also independently observed it feeding on large earthworms.



178. White-bellied Sholakili with a cicada in its beak.



Both: Viral Joshi

177. Snake, roadkill.

Although the White-bellied Sholakili is relatively well studied, in terms of its genetic affinities, there is still very poor knowledge of its natural history, specifically its foraging habit. Ali & Ripley (1973) considered Sholakili as "chiefly insectivorous", while Collar et al. (2019) suggested that it "presumably forages small insects

The Malabar Whistling Thrush *Myophonus horsfieldii* has been recorded feeding on snakes (Sayyed et al. 2018) while the Pied Bushchat *Saxicola caprata* has been observed feeding on a lizard (Nanayakkara et al. 2018). Compared to the whistling thrush's, the Sholakili's is an instance of a much smaller bird preying on a larger vertebrate is interesting. Both the shield tails and the earthworms are high-elevation / montane specialists in this habitat.

We thank Vishnudas C. K. and others in Behaviour Ecology Evolution Research Lab IISER for their inputs, Nikhil Phaniraj providing a photo, and Kodaikanal International School for help with logistics.

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Mutation 'Brown' in Gadwall *Mareca strepera* from Gujarat, India

While birding at Mahi River (22.35°N, 73.04°E), near Kotna village, Vadodara District, Gujarat, on 20 May 2019, we spotted a colour aberrant duck. As the colour was unusual we took some photographs and tried to identify it with the help of Grimmett et al. (2011), and Rasmussen & Anderton (2012). A typical black eyeline, as well as an orange beak with a black lining on the upper mandible were visible, indicating a female Gadwall *Mareca strepera* [179]. The colour of this individual's plumage was pale or weak, indicating that it was not a case of albinism as it had normal, black coloured eyes, and all the features resembled those of a female Gadwall, except for the body colour. Its white belly extended, typically, up to its chest and it had paler body feathers instead of prominently scaled ones. Subsequently, when we visited the same place on 20 June 2019, we spotted the same individual foraging amidst submerged vegetation in the reserve water of the check dam on Mahi River. We were surprised that it had remained around Vadodara during its breeding season, whereas no other Gadwalls were found in the nearby area. Later, it flew away along with a Lesser Whistling Duck *Dendrocygna javanica* [180]. After 20 June 2019, we did not see this individual bird in the area.



179. Dilution in Gadwall



180. Gadwall in flight with Lesser Whistling Duck

Both: Keyur H. Naria

Our literature survey could not help towards conclusion, hence the photographs were sent to Hein van Grouw, Senior Curator, Bird Group, Department of Life Sciences, The Natural History Museum, UK (van Grouw 2006, 2013), and Jugalkishor Patel (Patel 2018). The aberration involved is not progressive

greying because, there, the pigmented feathers would still be their normal colour and that was not the case with this bird (Hein van Grouw, *in litt.*, e-mail dated 19 August 2019). Further, this bird, which looks pale/white is the result of the mutation 'Brown' in combination with the bleaching effect of the sunlight (Hein van Grouw, *ibid.*; Jugalkishor Patel, *in litt.*, e-mail dated 19 August 2019). On the basis of their responses we concluded that the colour aberration of Gadwall observed is a case of mutation 'Brown'.

A qualitative reduction of eumelanin is known as mutation 'brown'. In this mutation, the number of the eumelanin pigment granules remains unaffected, but the appearance of the eumelanin is altered; as a result of which, normally, black pigment turns dark brown, and the phaeomelanin is unchanged (van Grouw 2006, 2013). Nevertheless, feathers of such mutant individuals are sensitive to sunlight and will bleach quickly; it is also hard to distinguish this mutation in the field, as the original colour would have been lost (van Grouw 2006, 2013). Further, the eye colour is not much affected, but the feet and bill are most likely to acquire a paler colour (van Grouw 2013). The inheritance of mutation 'brown' is recessively sex-linked and the affected individual is always a female and is very rarely a male (van Grouw 2006). The mutation 'brown' is the most frequently encountered colour aberration in birds after progressive greying (van Grouw 2013).

An albino Gadwall was reported from Bharatpur, Rajasthan (Harrison & Harrison 1972), which was later corrected as a mutation 'brown' by Mahabal et al. (2016). This is, probably, the second record of mutation 'brown' in a Gadwall from India. We wonder why it could not migrate back with other individuals and if mutation 'brown' played any physiological role in preventing the migration of this individual.

We are very grateful to Hein van Grouw, and Jugalkishor Patel for helping with the identification of the colour aberration exhibited by bird.

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