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61. Red-breasted Parakeet seen with pecked bits of bark.

The avian haemosporidian group is composed of protozoans of the genera *Plasmodium*, *Haemoproteus*, *Leucocytozoon*, and *Fallisia*, and these parasites have a global distribution and commonly infect birds in the wild (de Aguilar et al. 2018). Haemosporidian infection by protozoa of the genus *Plasmodium* and *Haemoproteus* has been considered one of the most important factors related to the extinction, or population decline, of several species of birds worldwide (Tostes et al. 2015), thus, in turn, parasite hosts have evolved anti-parasite behavioural, physiological, or immunological defenses, among which, feeding behaviour plays an important role in affecting the susceptibility of the birds to parasites (Masello et al. 2018).

Members of the Psittaciformes, in the wild, feed on toxic fruits, seeds, and flower buds, and possibly use secondary metabolites present in their diet as self-medication to reduce parasite load (Masello et al. 2018). A study on 19 Psittacine species (Indo-Malayan, Australasian, and Neotropical regions) showed that 15 species, which consumed food with antimalarial or general antiparasitic properties, were free from *Haemoproteus*, *Plasmodium*, *Leucocytozoon*, *Trypanosoma* and microfilariae (Masello et al. 2018), which suggest widespread prophylactic antiparasitic self-medication in Psittaciformes. De Mello (1935) reported a total of nine species of *Haemoproteus* occurring in nine genera of Indian birds, but knowledge on parasitic infection in wild Psittaciformes is scarce, especially in north-eastern India. The present feeding behavior of Red-breasted Parakeet, on the bark of *Aglaia spectabilis*, probably suggests prophylaxis against the haemoparasites.

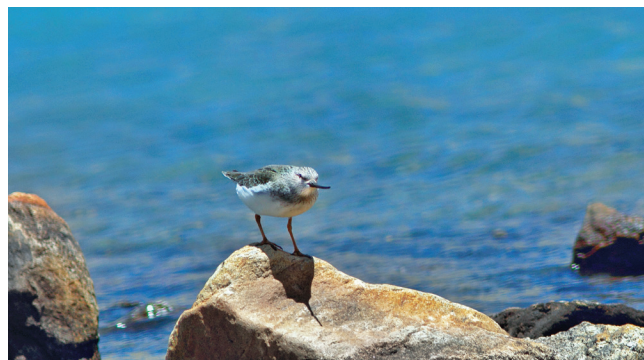
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A Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus* from the Sikkim Himalaya

On 20 May 2012, while traveling to Gurudongmar Lake for a high land bird survey, Karma, along with Niraj Thapa and Pemba Tshering, photographed [62] a Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus* on the banks of the Gurudongmar Lake, North Sikkim, Eastern Himalaya (28.02°N, 88.71°E; 5,425 m asl). Its identification is straightforward based upon its up-curved bill and pale legs (Grimmett et al. 2011); Tim Inskipp also confirmed the identity [Tim Inskipp, Facebook comment in May 2012]. Till date there have been no reports of this species from the Sikkim Himalayas (Ali 1962; Grimmett et al. 2011; Grimmett et al. 2019; Acharya & Vijayan 2011; ENVIS Centre Sikkim 2015; eBird 2020), and our record seems to be an addition to the avifauna of the Sikkim Himalayas. The bird must have been on passage from its wintering grounds on the eastern seaboard of India, along the Teesta River, to its breeding grounds in the northern Palaearctic. Vaurie (1972) had reported it, on migration, from Tibet.

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Karma Tempo

62. Terek Sandpiper at Gurudongmar Lake.

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Postcard from Sri Lanka—birding during a pandemic

As I sit in the balcony of our colonial-style bungalow in Sri Lanka, the COVID-19 pandemic rages across the globe. Apart from its unspeakable death toll, the misery caused to local people by the widespread lockdowns is depressing. Yet, I count my blessings. Here I am in a comfortable house at the end of a winding wooded lane, perched atop a cliff overlooking the clear blue Indian Ocean. I have a stocked pantry, Internet access, and above all, I am surrounded by abundant birdlife. What more can I ask for, given the dreary circumstances?

I came to Matara, Sri Lanka, in early February 2020, as a U.S. Fulbright Scholar to the University of Ruhuna. My mission was to teach the science of climate change to students and lay audiences, to promote birding as a way to connect with nature, and highlight career and higher education opportunities at my home institution, the University of Arkansas-Fort Smith. After seven weeks of bliss, our world was turned upside down by the pandemic. For the first time in its storied 70-year history, the Fulbright Program got suspended worldwide. We were strongly urged to return home for fear of us getting stuck abroad without return flights. But given the deteriorating health situation in the USA and the relatively stable situation in Sri Lanka, my wife and I decided to stay put. Months into the lockdowns here, and across the globe, and with air travel suspended, a clear end to the pandemic is nowhere in sight. We are voluntarily stuck in Sri Lanka.

I have always told students in my ornithology classes that if they get into birding, there will be no boredom in their lives, since birds are everywhere. So, faced with an indefinite house confinement, I resorted to a blitz of balcony birding. The monthly challenges announced by eBird, to submit yard lists, Big Day lists, and one-location lists, plus the Avurudu Bird Count spear-headed annually (to celebrate the song season of *Kohas*—Asian Koel *Eudynamis scolopaceus*) by the Field Ornithology Group of Sri Lanka, were added incentives. With 214 eBird checklists to date, reporting 82 species, my yard shows one of the highest tallies in the country for this time period.

Sri Lanka is a mecca for birders, with over 500 bird species, including about 30 endemics, a warm and hospitable people, and world-class yet affordable hotels. While the pandemic has shattered my dreams of scouring the country for birds,

especially the endemics-rich central highlands, I manage to get some decent birding done every day from my easy chair in the balcony.

I was initially struck by the similarity of Sri Lanka's birds with their counterparts in southern India. After all, about 10,000 years ago, Sri Lanka was contiguous with southern India. Rising sea levels at the end of the last Ice Age isolated and made it an island. The birdlife here, in southern Sri Lanka, is similar to that of the plains of Tamil Nadu, but some birds are noticeably darker. House Crows *Corvus splendens* have less contrast between the grey neck and darker body; White-bellied Drongos *Dicrurus caeruleus* are just white-vented; the coffee brown colour of Red-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer* appears like a darker roast; and Yellow-billed Babblers *Turdoides affinis* seem to have a dirtier head. Some birds sound a little different too. White-browed bulbuls *Pycnonotus luteolus* have less explosive whistles.

From our 37 m high balcony, I have a commanding view of a verdant coconut and jackfruit tree-filled valley, and beyond that, the clear blue Indian Ocean. On both sides of the balcony are towering trees whose canopies are at eye-level. Every morning these days, I am treated with spectacular aerial displays of the ubiquitous Green Imperial Pigeons *Ducula aenea*. Occasionally, while they are at it, they even clap their wings audibly, above their bodies, apparently in an attempt to gain their partner's attention. Having a panoramic vista means you get views (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S67706304>) seldom seen from the ground. Swifts and swallows fly under you or at eye level, often dashing by within touching distance. I capture Mp3 sounds with my little Olympus WS-853 voice recorder that I may not easily get from ground. The audio of the endemic Sri Lanka Swallow *Cecropis hyperythra* from my balcony is the only one in eBird's audio database (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S67712315>). The soft chattering of endemic Sri Lankan Grey Hornbills *Ocyeros gingalensis*, as they courted and copulated at eye level on coconut trees (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S67772285>), and the Lesser Yellownappe's *Picus chlorolopus* oddly raptor-like scream (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S67061973>), are two of my 69 audio uploads from Sri Lanka, augmenting my small and growing collection of bird sounds.