



C. Abhinav

75. Habitat shot of Merlin Nagrota Surian, Pong Lake on 06 November 2011.

3. Suryawanshi (2014) observed and photographed a male Merlin, from a distance, at Thinam, Spiti, Lahaul & Spiti District (32.31°N, 78.06°E; c.4,640 m asl) on 07 October 2014.
4. AV observed a small falcon at Dumla, Spiti, Lahaul & Spiti District (32.21°N, 77.59°E; c.4,100 m asl) on 13 September 2016 at 1610 h. It was sighted from a vantage point overlooking a gully. The brown upperparts and boldly streaked underparts could be easily noted since the bird was flying at almost eye-level. The face was rather plain and no striking features were noted. It was identified as female Merlin.

Ganpule & Bhatt (2013) reported *pallidus* as the commonest race in the Little Rann of Kachchh, Gujarat; but at Pong Lake, the observed individuals didn't look like this race, as they were darker, with strongly marked underparts (in both male and female). The female seen by CA [73,74] is particularly interesting as the blue-grey upperparts, the strongly patterned underparts, and the tail barring is suggestive of *aesalon* or of *aesalon*-type; the racial identification of other individuals seen here was not attempted by us as a detailed paper on the racial identification of Merlins in India is under preparation (Prasad Ganpule, in litt., e-mail dated 28 May 2020).

The Merlin is a rare winter visitor to northern and north-western India (Grimmett et al. 1998; Naoroji 2006; Ganpule & Bhatt 2013). Ali & Ripley (1987), Kazmierczak (2000), and Grimmett et al. (2011) have not mentioned/shown any record of the species from Himachal Pradesh. Naoroji (2006) did not mention any record from Himachal Pradesh, but suspected its presence in the state. den Besten (2004) did not observe the species during his extensive avian surveys between 1997 and 2003, in Kangra District, which included Pong Lake. Dhadwal & Kanwar (2018) mentioned it as a rare autumn passage migrant in Himachal Pradesh.

The neighbouring states of Punjab, and Haryana, and the Union Territories of Jammu, and Kashmir are in its regular wintering range, and in Ladakh, it is a rare passage migrant (Pfister 2004; Naoroji 2006). Mohan & Sondhi (2017) did not mention the species from Uttarakhand, but, there is one sight record from Kanchala, Amrutganga Valley, Kedarnath, Rudraprayag District at 2,600 m asl (Dixit et al. 2016; Viral Joshi, *pers comm.*, dated 26 May 2020).

The record of Merlin from Pong Lake, on 25 February 2009, is probably the first properly documented record of this species from Himachal Pradesh. All other records of Merlin in Himachal Pradesh have been noted during its migration, except for the first

sighting, which was in February, and could be treated as a late winter sighting. These few records suggest that the Merlin is a rare passage migrant in the state.

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— C. Abhinav & Ankit Vikrant

C. Abhinav, Village & P.O. Ghurkari, Kangra 176001, Himachal Pradesh, India. E-mail: drabhinav.c@gmail.com [CA] [Corresponding Author]
Ankit Vikrant, Department of Space, Earth and Environment, Chalmers University of Technology, Maskingränd 2, 412 58 Gothenburg, Sweden.
E-mail: ankitvikrant74@gmail.com [AV]

First record of the Chinese Rubythroat *Calliope tschebaiewi* in Uttarakhand, India

The New Forest campus of the Forest Research Institute (FRI) is located in the Dehradun Valley in Uttarakhand. It is rich in avian diversity, including both, migratory as well as resident birds. Its avian checklist stands at a phenomenal 252 species within its small area of 4.5 sq. km (Kumar 2018). New Forest is surrounded by extensive human inhabitation, except for a weak linkage to degraded forests on its northern side, at the base of the Mussoorie Range of the outer Himalaya. A tributary of Yamuna River runs through its north-western boundary.

On 17 February 2020, HC was birding in New Forest, near the rivulet, in an area dominated by dense thickets of *Lantana camara* (30.354°N, 77.988°E; c.610 m asl). At 0857 h, HC heard a bird singing. On approaching the singing bird, he spotted a Rubythroat perched on the branch of *Lantana camara* [76]. It had a striking red throat, bordered by a black breast band. It had prominent white supercilium and moustachial stripe. The

upperparts were brownish grey. Photographs were taken and later send to CA. The Siberian Rubythroat *Calliope calliope* was ruled out as the bird in the photographs had a black breast band and was considerably darker. The prominent white moustachial stripe ruled out the closely related Himalayan Rubythroat *C. pectoralis*. CA identified it as a male Chinese Rubythroat *C. tschebaiewi*, one of the three Rubythroat species found in the Indian Subcontinent.



Himanshu C.

76. Chinese Rubythroat in Uttarakhand, India.

The Chinese Rubythroat was earlier included under the White-tailed Rubythroat, along with three other subspecies: *C. p. pectoralis*, *C. p. bailloni*, and *C. p. confusa* (Ali & Ripley 1987; Grimmett et al. 1998; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). Now it is considered a separate species (Liu et al. 2016; Clements et al. 2019; del Hoyo et al. 2020). Breeding range of Chinese Rubythroat extends from extreme eastern Kashmir, through southern Tibetan Plateau to northern Bhutan, northern Arunachal Pradesh, eastern and north-eastern Tibetan Plateau, central China and extreme northern Myanmar (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012; del Hoyo et al. 2020). Recently it was reported from Spiti during summer season, in the neighboring state of Himachal Pradesh (Abhinav & Kuriakose 2019). It breeds between 2,600 and 4,800 m asl, mostly above 4,000 m asl, and winters in the foothills of eastern Nepal, north-eastern India, north-eastern Bangladesh, northern Myanmar, and southern Yunnan (Ali & Ripley 1987; del Hoyo et al. 2020). It is rare in Nepal, but common in the Assam Valley and the South Assam Hills (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012).

New Forest and the Dehradun Valley are well-heeled birdwatching regions (Wright 1957; George 1962; Guha 1967; Mohan 1993, 1997; Singh 2000). There have been no records of the Chinese Rubythroat from Uttarakhand (Ali & Ripley 1987; Mohan & Sondhi 2017; eBird 2020) and the present record is the first for the state. This record is surprising as the species' wintering range starts from eastern Nepal (Ali & Ripley 1987; del Hoyo et al. 2020), which is c.800 km eastwards of this record, and 17 February is too early for spring migration. This single record should be considered as a vagrant record; however birders should remain vigilant for its presence in the foothills of Western Himalayas during winter season.

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— Himanshu C. & C. Abhinav

Himanshu C., Village Bainskuan, P.O. Jamniwala, Teshil Paonta Sahib District Sirmour 173025, Himachal Pradesh, India. E-mail: hc.7123@gmail.com [HC]
C. Abhinav, Village & P.O. Ghurkari, Kangra 176001, Himachal Pradesh, India. E-mail: drabhinav.c@gmail.com [CA] [Corresponding author]

On the occurrence of the Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus* in Mizoram, India

The Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus* is a winter visitor to India (Ali & Ripley 1987). In north-eastern India it is common in Assam (Choudhury 2000). It affects waterbodies including beels, marshes, and riverbanks. In Mizoram, it has not been reported (Choudhury 2005, 2006, 2016). Choudhury (2008) has not included it in the main bird list, but mentioned that it is likely to occur. Lalthanzara & Kasambe (2015) also did not mention anything about the species.

On 21 November 2016, I started a boat journey (country boat fitted with a small motor) along the Assam–Mizoram border, following the Pakwa or Teirei River, a tributary of the Dhaleswari. In its upper reaches this river marks the eastern boundary of the Dampa Tiger Reserve. The objective was to inspect a Border Police Out Post located at Gutguti, in Inner Line Reserved Forest, Assam. At 1035 h, a sandpiper was seen flying on and off (disturbed a bit by the boat), sometimes landing on the sand banks on the right, and sometimes on the left of the river. The right bank was in Mizoram's Mamit District, and the left, in