Rough-legged Buzzard *Buteo lagopus* from Ladakh, India

On Sunday, 03 January 2021 I planned a drive towards Hemis village for birding, and while returning via Stakna village (33.97°N, 77.70°E; c.3,230 m) I saw a raptor on a Poplar *Populus nigra*. At first I thought it was just another Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo* (first winter), but after taking some photographs and analyzing them I realized that the bird was different from the Common Buzzard we usually see in Ladakh. That evening, I put the photos [48–52] of the bird on social media and sent some photographs for identification to the person I always ask for help in identifying confusing bird species (Andrew Paul Bailey), and to my surprise, everyone commented it was a Rough-legged Buzzard *Buteo lagopus*! To satisfy myself further, I referred some books I had, Arlott (2014), and Svensson et al. (2010), and was convinced that the bird I had spotted was a Rough-legged Buzzard, which is new for Ladakh.
The cold greyish-brownish colour tones, with indistinct internal barring on primaries and secondaries, which is concentrated to the distal part, large brownish belly patch combined with streaked breast, almost whitish bases to tail feathers and quite clear-cut dark area on the tip of ‘my’ bird fits that of a juvenile Rough-legged Buzzard. The feathered tarsi are another key pointer that eliminates Common or Himalayan Buzzard. The bill is tiny for other *Buteo* with feathered tarsi: Long-legged Buzzard *B. Rufinus* and Upland Buzzard *B. Hemilasius*. The tail is extremely important, showing a white inner half and very few sparse and diffuse bars in the dark-shaded outer half; this is a typical tail for a juvenile Rough-legged Buzzard (the upptail cannot be seen well in the images, but the pattern is clearly shown in some of the backlit images from underneath). Eastern Buzzards (including *B. Japonicus* and *B. Burmanicus*) have brown upper tails and, if there is barring, it is fine, and usually covers the entire upper tail in juveniles. In Upland Buzzard, which is a big and heavy bird, the tail can be partly white, but the barring would be fine and distinct. Most buteos show barred secondaries, with the barring spaced over the entire feather. In juvenile Rough-legged Buzzard, only the outer section of each secondary shows a few bars, leaving the inner half largely plain white, which is a unique feature as seen in this bird.

The only prior claim of this species from the Indian Subcontinent is of one reported by S. D. Ripley from Tongsa, central Bhutan on 05 November 1973. The details of the sighting is unavailable though the bird hovered over the road and afforded a perfect view (Ali et al. 1996). It is also reported to be a winter vagrant to Afghanistan, but treated as hypothetical for South Asia (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). It is not listed in the checklists of birds of South Asia (Praveen et al. 2020a), or India (Praveen et al. 2020b).

I thank Chris Kehoe, Ashwin Viswanathan, Praveen J., Eivor Ritavuori Os Rosenberb, and Andrew Paul Bailey for helping me with the identification of this species, and for the detailed identification comments from two anonymous referees.

**References**


— Sonam Choldhan (Gasha)

c/o Gasha House, Spituk Village, UT Ladakh, India. E-mail: choldan18@gmail.com

The Blue-tailed Bee-eater *Merops philippinus* in Sikkim, India

We report the sight records of two Blue-tailed Bee-eaters Merops *philippinus* from close to Lachung village (27.73°N, 88.74°E), in North Sikkim District, Sikkim, India.

On 14 October 2019, we stopped after seeing a flock of birds of sub-alpine range, consisting of tits *Periparus* sp., tits and leafwarblers *Phylloscopus* sp. All of a sudden, two birds were spotted that were swinging and flying around electric poles of the nearby army cantonment, just at the edge of the army campus (c.3,210 m asl) at 12.51 h. We shot a video of the birds perched on the electric wire [53].

The state of Sikkim has been well covered by avian surveys in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Even after perusing historical literature of erstwhile ornithologists, we could not retrieve data for this species from the state of Sikkim in any of the subsequent works (Ali 1962; Dutta 2006; Acharya 2011; Grimmett 2019; Pittie 2019). Thus it could be concluded that the Blue-tailed Bee-eater is recorded here, for the first time from the Sikkim Himalayas. The species is a vagrant in Bhutan (Spierenburg 2005; Choudhury 2007; Grimmett 2019). However, in neighbouring West Bengal’s hill districts—Jalpaiguri, Kalimpong, and Darjeeling—have scattered sighting reports (Ebird 2021). In adjacent eastern Nepal, there are fairly common sighting records from the terai regions and the Kosi River flood plains (Ebird 2021).

We thank GoingWild LLP for the logistics arrangements for this tour, Birdwatchers’ Society (Kolkata) for multiple inputs, and an anonymous reviewer for helpful comments on this note.

**References**


