

The Swamp Grass Babbler *Laticilla cinerascens* in Majuli Island, Assam

Darbar Chapori is a large sand bar of Majuli Island, Assam, with an area of about 7 sq. km. Its surface is mostly covered with *Saccharum spontaneum*, along with *Tamarix dioica*, *Typha latifolia*, and *Ziziphus mauritiana*. On 11 November 2021 at 1630 h, while returning from the sand bar, I heard an unusual call from the tussocks (26.92°N, 94.21°E). After listening to it carefully for some time, I suspected it to be that of a Swamp Grass Babbler *Laticilla cinerascens*, but I was unsure because of the bird's rarity. On 16 November 2021, during my next visit to Darbar Chapori, I saw a Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus* near the grasses. While photographing the owl, I heard the same call from the grasses, very close to me. I followed the call and saw a Swamp Grass Babbler singing in the tussocks just a meter away from me. After quietly observing it for some time, I took some photographs [61].



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61. A Swamp Grass Babbler perched on *Saccharum spontaneum*.

The Swamp Grass Babbler is endemic to the Brahmaputra floodplain of north-eastern India, and is restricted to a few sites in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh due to its specialized habitat requirements (Krishnan 2021). There is a prior record of the species from a site close to Majuli, known as Borah Chapori (Rahmani et al. 2016a, 2016b). [Borah Chapori is incorrectly named 'Borah Chapori Wildlife Sanctuary' in Krishnan 2021.] Recent records are few; most of them coming from the Guwahati region in the west, and Dibru Saikhowa National Park, Maguri Beel, and D'Ering Wildlife Sanctuary in the east (Krishnan 2021). Hence, this additional site, roughly midway between the two populations, is important for such a fast-dwindling species.

The grasslands of Majuli are heavily degraded and face a great threat from over-grazing, agricultural expansion, thatch collection, fragmentation, etc. These threats are increasing day by day and make it difficult for the survival of such a rare and specialized species.

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Black-bellied Tern *Sterna acuticauda* and Moustached Warbler *Acrocephalus melanopogon* from Jammu and Kashmir, India

Black-bellied Tern

On the 1st of April, 2019, at 7:00 hrs, PC and AK went to the banks of Chenab river for birding in Jourian, Akhnoor (32.81°N, 74.58°E), approximately 40 km west of Jammu in Jammu and Kashmir. The area is a river bed with a lot of reed growing on sandy and muddy substratum surrounding the Chenab. We found many passerine bird species along with three tern species, Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*, Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybrida*, and River Tern *S. aurantia* and also got good photographs of those. After leaving the spot, while looking at the clicked photographs of River Terns, two different variants were found, and one of those was having a blackish belly, which was later on identified as Black-bellied Tern *S. acuticauda* after finding characters like the blackish belly and deeper fork of the tail (Grimmett et al. 2011) [62]. After a week, we (PC and AK) again visited the same spot and found a pair resting on a small island which was quite far away, almost in the centre of the river. On 9th of February 2020, 9:00 hrs, PC, AK and PK visited the same spot and observed a single individual flying over the river but was quite far this time (Chibber & Kumar 2020).



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62. Black-bellied tern.

There is a earlier record of Black-bellied Tern from Baramulla, J&K (34.06°N, 74.79°E) on 11th of May, 2016 but no photographic evidence was available. Also, Grimmett et al. 2011 map a small location in Pakistan administered Kashmir, the source of it which we could not trace.

Moustached Warbler

On 22nd of September, 2019, 10:30 hrs, we (PC and AK) spotted and photographed a warbler species in the reed along the Chenab river at the same location (Jourian, Akhnoor) where Black-bellied Tern was observed. It was later identified as Moustached Warbler *Acrocephalus melanopogon* after carefully looking at the characters like broad square-ended supercilium with blackish sides of crown and black eye-stripe (Grimmett et al. 2011) [63]. Our observation marked its first confirmed report from Jammu and Kashmir. Grimmett et al. 2011 map a vast area in Pakistan and Pakistan administered Kashmir and some trace records in Indian plains as its winter migration grounds whereas Shah (2017) reported its presence from Marala, Punjab (Pakistan). After our observation, one individual was spotted in the reeds near Gharana Wetland Reserve (32.54°N, 74.69°E), 30 km south of Jammu on 29th December, 2019 (Chibber & Kumar 2019). Kumar (2019) spotted one individual in the reed bed around Basantar rivulet (32.51°N, 75.02°E), Samba, whereas Shagoo (2019) spotted two individuals near Indo-Pak border at Samba (32.50°N, 75.09°E) on 1st March 2020). Again, on the 12th of January, 2021, at 17:00 hrs, two individuals were spotted by PC & RM in the reed near Ravi river at Keeriyana (32.32°N, 75.51°E), Kathua (J&K) (Chibber & Mahaldar 2021).



63. Moustached Warbler

Our present sightings and photographic records establish the presence of Black-bellied Tern and Moustached Warbler in Jammu and Kashmir.

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The Black-necked Crane *Grus nigricollis* in Uttarakhand, western Himalaya

The Black-necked Crane *Grus nigricollis* is found in the highlands of the Tibetan Plateau, and the high-altitude regions of India and Bhutan. It inhabits and breeds at high elevations between 2,500–5,000 m asl, largely around Alpine bog meadows and fresh water wetlands (Archibald et al. 2020). It is distributed from eastern Ladakh in north-western India to Sikkim, Bhutan, and Arunachal Pradesh in the east, through Tibet to Sichuan in south-western China (Ganguli-Lachungpa 1998; Lhuendup & Webb 2009; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012; Chandan et al. 2013; Daniel Mize et al. 2018; Menzies et al. 2019).



64. A pair of Black-necked Crane observed in wet meadow habitat.