

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.

I would like to thank Ankur Hazarika, Sarmistha Borah, and Tilak Ch. Sarmah for their constant support and encouragement.

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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).



Pankaj Chibber

62. Black-bellied tern.