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The Red-tailed Wheatear *Oenanthe chrysopygia* in Punjab, India

While birdwatching on 27 February 2022, near a village called Chappar Chiri Khurd (30.70°N, 76.66°E) in Mohali District, Punjab, India, I saw a bird of the *Oenanthe* sp. It was mostly plain brown-grey above and grey-white below. I took a few photographs, which didn't turn out to be good owing to the harsh light of early afternoon. Initially it was identified as an Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina* due to its plain brown appearance. However, after processing the photographs, the light rufous-orange rump and rusty tail tips were noticed.

In order to ascertain the identity of the bird, the same site was visited again on the morning of 7 March 2022. The bird was found at the same spot again. The rufous-orange rump and tail tips were clearly observed. The rufous buff tinge was extending variably to flanks and belly. Also, the bird had a warm buff-brown

tone on its ear-coverts and a greyer cast on the sides of its neck. A blackish eye-stripe, mostly pronounced on lores, and poorly defined greyish-white supercilium were also observed. Matching the photographs with published work, it was identified as a Red-tailed Wheatear *O. chrysopygia* (also known as the Persian Wheatear after being split from *O. xanthopyrma*). The Red-tailed Wheatears that visit north-western India in winter are Persian Wheatears, and breed in Baluchistan (Grimmett et al. 2011; Shirihai & Svensson 2018).



186. Red-tailed Wheatear at Chappar Chiri Khurd, Punjab, 27 February 2022.



187. Red-tailed Wheatear displaying rufous-orange rump and tail tips.

Both: Rajive Das

Previous Indian records are mostly from the states of Rajasthan and Gujarat (eBird 2022). Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) have presumptively mapped a part of the Punjab in their distribution maps, but no definitive reports to back this could be found. It has been reported from the adjoining states/UTs of Jammu & Kashmir (eBird 2022), Himachal Pradesh (Grimmett et al. 2011), Delhi NCR (Mehta & Dogra 2018; Harvey & Vyas 2018), and as close as the adjoining UT of Chandigarh (Singh 2005). The bird is not listed in the BNHS Envis (2022) Punjab list. Apart from a recent sight report from Ayali Khurd in Ludhiana District, Punjab on 14 October 2020 (Saggar 2020), of which no further details are available, there are no other records of this species from the state. Notwithstanding that it has occurred all around the state, this would be the first evidence of the bird's presence in the Punjab.

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Range extension of the Nepal House Martin *Delichon nipalense* into Himachal Pradesh and Punjab, India

There are three species of house martins in India: Nepal House Martin *Delichon nipalense*, Common House Martin *D. urbicum*, and Asian House Martin *D. dasypus*—and all of them have glossy blue-black upperparts with contrasting white rumps (Turner & Rose 1989; Grimmett et al. 2011). The nominate race of the Nepal House Martin is a resident in the Himalaya from Uttarakhand, through Nepal and the neighbouring Tibetan Plateau, north-eastern India, Bangladesh, and eastwards to western Myanmar (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012; Turner 2020).

It is mostly seen over forests, river valleys, mountain ridges with cliffs and around villages (Grimmett et al. 1998). This note describes multiple, recent records of the Nepal House Martin from the Western Himalaya, outside its known range, and the consequent range extension of the species.

Records in Himachal Pradesh and Punjab

We describe a few important records of the Nepal House Martin from Himachal Pradesh and Punjab, followed by a compilation of all the records from these two states in Table 1.

- On 6 January 2014, at 1210 h, CA saw a mixed flock of swallows and martins at Barot, Mandi District, Himachal Pradesh (32.04°N, 76.84°E; 1,850 m asl). There were c.40 birds circling above an open ground, which was surrounded by a hill forest on one side and a reservoir on Uhl River on the other. There were four Red-rumped Swallows *Cecropis daurica*, ten Barn Swallows *Hirundo rustica*; all other birds had blackish upperparts with a contrasting white rump and whitish underparts, indicating that these were house martins. In photographs, CA noticed the dark underwings, black undertail coverts, and the absence of a fork in the tails of these birds [188, see below]. CA identified these birds as Nepal House Martins. Similar looking Asian House Martin and Common House Martin have a forked tail and white or whitish vent and undertail coverts. They were seen hawking insects for about 20 m.
- On the morning of 21 April 2016, AV saw a flock of at least 20 Nepal House Martins flying overhead a section of Villa Round, Nahan, Sirmour District, Himachal Pradesh that abuts the ridge at the town's eastern end (30.56°N, 77.31°E; 880 m asl). The town is surrounded by broadleaf forest. The birds were readily identified by the above-mentioned features. These martins, along with six Dusky Crag Martins *Ptyonoprogne concolor*, hawked for roughly five minutes, staying closer to the ridge.

Table 1. Records of Nepal House Martin *D. nipalense* in Himachal Pradesh and Punjab, India

S.No.	Date	Location	Coordinates	Habitat	Approx. Altitude in m asl	Approx. No. of birds	Observer	Photographed
1	6-1-2014	Barot, Mandi District, H.P.	32.04°N 76.84°E	Reservoir, Forest, near Village	1,850	40	CA	Yes [188]
2	21-4-2016	Nahan, Sirmour District, H.P.	30.56°N 77.31°E	Forest, near town	880	20	AV	No
3	26-2-2017	Kataula, Mandi District, H.P.	31.80°N 77.05°E	River Valley	1,350	6	CA	Yes [189]
4	7-1-2018	Renuka Lake, Sirmour District, H.P.	30.61°N 77.45°E	Lake, Forest	690	40-50	CA, AV	Yes
5	25-2-2018	Chail Chowk, Mandi District, H.P.	31.55°N 77.03°E	River Valley	1,360	12	CA	No
6	2-3-2019	Dunera, Pathankot District, Punjab	32.40°N 75.89°E	River Valley, Forest	540	70-90	CA	No
7	26-5-2019	Banjar, Kullu District, H.P.	31.62°N 77.34°E	River Valley, Forest edge, near Village	1,620	25	CA, PD	Yes [190, 191]
8	11-2019 to 2-2020	Near Chamba Town, Chamba District, H.P.	32.57°N 76.11°E	Open area near town	1,000	Upto 150	DCS	Yes [192]
9	28-12-2019	Shimla Catchment WLS, Shimla District, H.P.	31.11°N 77.23°E	Forest	2,150	10	Karuthedathu (2019)	No
10	9-6-2020	Dharamkot, Kangra District, H.P.	32.25°N 76.32°E	Forest	2,200	15	CA, PD	Yes
11	1-11-2020 to 22-3-2021	Near Chamba Town, Chamba District, H.P.	32.57°N 76.11°E	Open area near town	1,000	Upto 220	DCS	Yes [193, 194]
12	27-1-2021	Sainj Valley, Great Himalayan National Park, Kullu District, H.P.	31.78°N 77.43°E	River Valley	1,950	8	CA, Vinay Kumar	Yes