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48. Small Niltava, Paschim Burdwan District, West Bengal

species in southern West Bengal aligns with reports of other Himalayan birds found outside their typical range in this region. The growth of the local birdwatching community, coupled with the extensive adoption of platforms such as eBird, has led to consistent unexpected species sightings in this region. Table 1 lists several of these recent records.

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Addition of the Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka* to the avifauna of Punjab, India

On 05 November 2023, while birding near the Siswan Dam (30.869°N, 76.746°E), *c.*22 km from Mohali and *c.*15 km from Chandigarh, on the Chandigarh-Baddi Road, Sahibzada Ajit Singh Nagar District, Punjab, India, PB observed and photographed a wheatear **[49–52]**. It caught insects and perched on dry bushes and on the ground. However, it did not stay on a single perch for much time.

Initially, thought to be a Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti*, the identity was eventually established as Pied Wheatear *O. pleschanka* first-winter male. This was based on a long primary projection, a buff supercilium, a dull grey-brown head and upper parts, blackish-brown wings with broad pale buff-brown fringing, and some black on the face and throat. The last characteristic is usually concealed by buff or whitish fringes (Clement & Rose 2015), but it showed well in this individual. Pinkish-buff breast (Shirihai & Svensson 2018) is another characteristic feature of a Pied Wheatear first-winter male that is evident in this individual. We sought opinions (in litt., emails dated January 2024) from several experts to confirm the identification. Nigel Collar, Richard Grimmett, Peter Alfrey, Raffael Ayé, Mohammad Kaboli, Shaobin Li, E. N. Panov, and Fares Khoury agreed with our assessment, identifying the bird as a first-winter male Pied Wheatear.

It must be noted that the observed individual has a rather small amount of fine pale buff fringing in the upper parts, thus forming only a faint scalloping pattern. Peter Clement noted in an email dated 26 January 2024 that it was unexpected for a first winter Pied Wheatear's upper parts to lack a prominent scalloped pattern with pale tips in November or December. He observed that while this bird shows some minimal or vestigial tips on the upper parts, the amount of wear seemed unusually extensive for the season, especially since the pale fringes on the wing coverts were still well-defined. Despite this anomaly, he identified the bird as a first-winter male Pied Wheatear. Therefore, this individual provides new insights into the moulting patterns of a first-winter male.


Pushkar Bali

49. Pied Wheatear first-winter male.

50. Another view of Pied Wheatear first-winter male.

51. Pied Wheatear first winter male showing pinkish-buff breast.

All: Pushkar Bali

52. Pied Wheatear first winter male showing creamy-white upper tail-coverts (a feature common with adults).

Pied Wheatear adult male in fresh plumage (autumn/winter) has crown and nape buffish-brown (may show white bases), black mantle and upper back partially or fully concealed by grey-brown tips, wings black with fine pale buff fringes and tips to wing-coverts forming two wing bars, and pale edges to tertials and inner secondaries; face to throat black finely tipped cream or whitish; rest of the underparts pale to sandy or orange-buff, becoming white on belly to undertail. First winter and adult females in fresh plumage (autumn/winter) have mantle and scapulars prominently scalloped with broad pale buff fringes (Clement & Rose 2015). Therefore, Pied Wheatear adult male and female in fresh plumage and first-winter female were ruled out. Desert Wheatear was eliminated because the observed individual exhibited a white side to the tail, whereas Desert Wheatear (Kazmierczak 2003) has a black tail contrasting with a white base and buff-tinged rump. Variable Wheatear *O. picata* forms do not have a supercilium, unlike this individual. Plumage features clearly eliminate the possibility of Isabelline Wheatear *O. isabellina* as well. Adult female and first-winter Northern Wheatear *O. oenanthe* can also be ruled out because they differ from Pied Wheatear by their slightly larger size and generally brown to warm brown (not predominantly dull grey-brown) on the head and upperparts, pale buff or whitish supercilium and dark eye stripe (Clement & Rose 2015). Peter Clement (in litt., email dated 26 January 2024) commented that the first winter Eastern Black-eared Wheatear *O. melanoleuca* can resemble a first winter Pied Wheatear in its drab grey-brown upperparts but lacks the pale-tipped scalloped effect. It is also typically paler, brighter, or sandy-tinged, rarely matching the colder grey-brown hue observed in the Pied Wheatear. It also features orange to orange-buff colouring on the breast and sides of the breast (unlike the observed bird).

Pied Wheatear is a Palearctic breeder, with the areas closest to the India being Afghanistan and N Pakistan. Within India, it breeds in the NW Himalayas. It winters in NE Africa and the SW Arabian Peninsula (Collar 2020). There are no previously published records of Pied Wheatear from Punjab, India (Pittie 2023). Additionally, there are no records in popular field guides (Grimmett et al. 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012) nor on eBird (eBird 2023). We also did not find any records in Facebook birding groups. However, according to the distribution map by Grimmett et al. (2011), the Pied Wheatear is a passage migrant in the adjacent Punjab province of Pakistan. Thus, the present observation constitutes the first record of Pied Wheatear from Punjab, India. This individual might have been on passage to its wintering grounds. We visited the location several times over the next few days but did not find the species again.

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Nesting of the Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus* from Jhajjar, Haryana, India

The Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus* has a wide geographic range spanning Europe, Africa, and Asia, including the Indian Subcontinent (Birdlife International 2022; Grimmett et al. 2011). The nominate subspecies *I. m. minutus* occurs in central and southern Europe and northern Africa east to western Siberia and through Iran to north-western India; it winters mainly in Africa (Martínez-Vilalta et al. 2020). In South Asia it is considered a summer visitor to Afghanistan, Pakistan in the Sindh, Gilgit, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa regions, and India in the Kashmir and Simla, Himachal Pradesh regions; it is a scarce winter visitor but mostly a passage migrant in the Indus Valley, Pakistan and elsewhere in India, and some records are confounded with Yellow Bittern *I. sinesis* (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). In India, the breeding of the Little Bittern has been conclusively confirmed only from Kashmir, with several works on the nesting and ecology of the species (Bates & Lowther 1952; Holmes & Hatchwell 1991; Fazili 2010; Fazili et al. 2014). Suspected and probable breeding have been reported from the Delhi area and from Gujarat, respectively (Trivedi & Parasharya 2019; Vyas 2019). In this note, we document conclusive, video-recorded evidence of the species nesting in the wetlands of Mandothi village, Jhajjar, Haryana, India.

Mandothi wetlands (28.709°N, 76.849°E; 230 m asl), which cover more than 100 ha, are as a result of rainwater accumulation in local village agricultural land (Rai & Yadav 2023). Most of the area is privately-owned, and large parts of the area become temporarily inundated during the monsoon season; however, the entire area is currently unprotected and not formally designated a wetland. The wetlands provides an important wintering grounds for many migratory species and boasts of high bird diversity, with at least 265 bird species reported to date (eBird 2023a). The Little Bittern was first reported from Mandothi wetlands when a male was spotted and photographed on 22 August 2021 (Rajiv 2021; Pati 2021). The species was sighted regularly in the area by several birders throughout September that year **[53, 54]**, with the last reported sighting on 02 October 2021 (eBird 2023b). The following year, on 02 September 2022, at approximately 0700 h, while birding around the wetlands of Mandothi village, we spotted a pair of Little Bitterns. The male showed a bright red flush to the bill and was observed to be very active in one patch of *Phragmites karka* grass along the village road. We suspected it was nesting at this patch and decided to thoroughly scan this area with binoculars. After 15 min, we finally discovered a nest with five chicks of differing sizes, presumably at different growth stages. The nest was placed in *Phragmites karka* grass at a distance of 1 m above the ground. Upon discovery of this active nest, we were unable to immediately ascertain which species it belonged to, whether Little Bittern or Yellow Bittern, as the chicks of the two species are undistinguishable. We took some photographs of the nest and the nest site while maintaining an appropriate distance and left the area within a minute to avoid any disturbance, following protocols and guidelines listed in Barve et al. (2020a).

53. Little Bittern in breeding plumage.

54. Little Bittern pair in breeding plumage dated 25 August 2021.

Both: Sonu Dalal

In the Delhi NCR region, there have been previous records of the species reportedly in breeding plumage or breeding season records during the monsoon period and also suspected breeding in the past (Ganguli 1975; Harvey et al. 2006; Vyas 2019; eBird 2023b). However, no records from this region have been supported with conclusive or direct evidence of confirmed breeding and nesting. Previously published literature has provided greater insight into the nesting of the species from Kashmir and Gujarat (Fazili 2010; Fazili et al. 2014; Trivedi & Parasharya 2019). This inspired us to further investigate whether there was any possibility of the Little Bittern breeding and nesting in the Mandothi area. We decided to use a time-lapse video camera (Brinno T2C 200 f1.2 model) to record the activities at the unknown nest that we had found on 02 September 2022 by video-recording the behaviour of the chicks and adults without impacting them, following recommended field guidelines (Barve et al. 2020a; Barve et al. 2020b). On 10 September 2022, at approximately 1630 h, we placed the camera at a distance of approximately 4–5 m away from the nest to minimize disruption. The time-lapse duration was set at 1 frame per 2 sec for a period of 24 hours. The next day, we collected the camera from the site and filtered the data. While reviewing the recorded footage, we found a male Little Bittern that appeared at the nest-site, approaching the nest and chicks at 0608 h, dated 11 September 2022, presumably for feeding the chicks. In the video (https://