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– **Harikrishna Patibanda, Sriram Reddy & Gopalakrishna Ramachandran**

Harikrishna Patibanda, N-203, Aparna Sarovar, Nallagandla, Serilingampally, Hyderabad, 500032, India. Email: p.harikrishna@gmail.com

Sriram Reddy, H. No. 403, Block C, RK towers, Mayuri Marg, Begumpet, Hyderabad, 500016, India. Email: sriram.birdwatcher@gmail.com

Gopalakrishna Ramachandran, Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, 36/P, Serilingampally, Hyderabad, 500046, India. Email: gopalakrishnaiyer@gmail.com [Corresponding author]

Falcatad Duck *Mareca falcata* from Hokersar Wetland: An addition to the avifauna of Jammu & Kashmir

Falcatad Duck *Mareca falcata* is distributed from eastern Siberia, Mongolia, and northern China to the Kuril Islands and northern Japan, and it winters to southern Japan, Korea, eastern China, northern Vietnam, west to Myanmar, and India (Carboneras & Kirwan 2020). It is listed as Near Threatened as per the IUCN Red List, owing to moderately rapid declines in China because of very high levels of hunting (BirdLife International 2024). The male Falcatad Duck is unmistakable in identification, having a bottle-green head, a maned hindneck, and black and grey elongated tertials (Grimmett et al. 2011). In India, Falcatad Duck is distributed from the northern plains of Punjab and Haryana to the Assam Valley, the lower parts of the southern Assam hills, southern West Bengal, and western Gujarat (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012; Abhinav & Dhadwal 2017). It is rare in the western parts of the country and uncommon, although regular, in Northeast India (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012).

On 15 February 2023, I was birding in the Hokersar Wetland near Zainakote, Srinagar District of Jammu & Kashmir (34.097°N, 74.716°E), when I saw an unfamiliar duck c.100 m away among the thousands of ducks of various common species. It had a greenish head, white throat, greyish body, elongated black and grey tertials, and a yellowish patch bordered by black at the rear end of the body. The bird was identified as a male Falcatad Duck. The duck did not come close to the shore, so clear photographs could not be taken [107]. It was again observed at the same location on 17 and 25 February 2023 but not thereafter (Sofi 2023). On 13 March 2023, a male Falcatad Duck was seen in Wular Lake, Bandipora District, Kashmir, by multiple observers (Jeelani 2023). It could not be ascertained whether it was the same individual seen in the Hokersar wetland or a different individual.



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107. Falcatad Duck at Hokersar Wetland on 15 February 2023.

Falcatad Duck has not been reported from Jammu & Kashmir previously (Ward 1907; Grimmett et al. 2011; eBird 2024), and the record from Hokersar Wetland is first for the Union Territory. The species has been included in the recently published checklist of birds of Jammu & Kashmir (Kichloo et al. 2024) on the basis of the records mentioned in this note (Muzaffar A. Kichloo pers. comm. dated 07 June 2024). This note provides the details of the sightings. The present findings were not unexpected, as there have been records of this species from further west in northern Pakistan (Grimmett et al. 2011) and from adjacent Himachal Pradesh (Abhinav & Dhadwal 2017).

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– **Hafizullah Sofi**

Hafizullah Sofi, Zainakote, HMT, Srinagar, 190012, Jammu & Kashmir, India.
E-mail: reyansofii@gmail.com

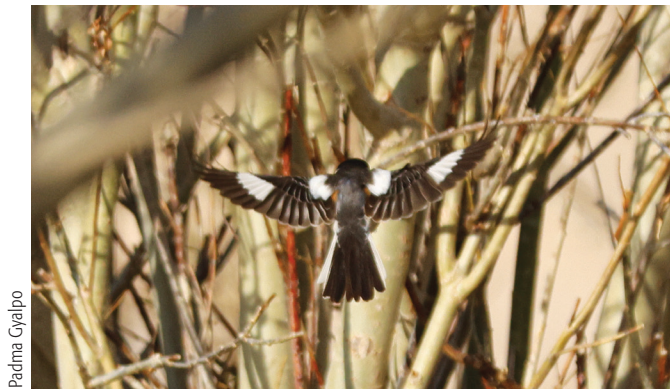
Masked Shrike *Lanius nubicus* from the Union Territory of Ladakh

On 04 June 2024, PG, TAS, and SC visited Hanley (32.773°N, 78.984°E), eastern Ladakh, to search for the Pallas's Fish Eagle *Haliaeetus leucoryphus*. As we could not find the eagle, at approximately 1730 h, we decided to bird around the Khaldo Bagh plantations until 1900 h. Soon enough, a small pied bird flew right in front of us and perched on a *Salix* tree a few metres ahead, giving us a few seconds to photograph it under low light conditions. We identified it as a shrike *Lanius* sp. and confirmed its specific identification as an adult female Masked Shrike *L. nubicus* using the Merlin app. Adult males and females are generally unmistakable (Shirihai & Svensson 2018), and our bird had neat, glossy black upperparts, black crown, black eyeline starting from behind the eye and arching to meet the crown, white face, orangish breast, and white lower belly and vent [108]. In flight, the otherwise blackish bird had two broad white wing mirrors formed by the basal half of the primaries, large, white and puffy wing coverts, white outer tail feathers, and a noticeably grey mantle; the last feature confirms that it is a female [109]. The bird was observed again at 0600 h on 05 June and was seen continuously feeding on insects and caterpillars. More images are available in Gyalpo (2024a, 2024b).



Padma Gyalpo

108. Masked Shrike female showing orangish breast on an otherwise pied plumage.



Padma Gyalpo

109. Masked Shrike female in flight showing broad white wing patches and grey mantle.

While the Masked Shrike has been widely recorded as a vagrant in the Western Palearctic (Lefranc & Worfolk 2022), such widespread vagrancy has not been reported in the Oriental region and this species is a rare vagrant here. There is only one previous record of the Masked Shrike from the Indian Subcontinent, which was from southern Gujarat in 2017 (Bharati 2017). Our record from Hanley in Ladakh is the easternmost record of the species and the second confirmed record for India and the Indian Subcontinent.

We would like to thank Choldan Gasha and Lt Col Avadhesh Malik for providing additional information regarding Masked Shrike and Sanderling. Thanks also to Acho Paljor of Paljor Homestay for his hospitality and for arranging our stay in Hanley Village.

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Padma Gyalpo, Shey Choldan House, Leh, 194101, Union Territory of Ladakh, India.
E-mail: gyalpo4086@gmail.com. [PG] [Corresponding author]
Tashi Angchok Stanba, Norbulinga Chubi, Leh, 194101, Union Territory of Ladakh, India
E-mail: tashiangchok1@gmail.com. [TAS]
Stanzin Chamba, Sumoor Nubra, Leh, 194101, Union Territory of Ladakh, India.
E-mail: stanzinnubra44@gmail.com. [SC]

Letter to the Editors

Incorrect identification of colour aberrations published in *Indian BIRDS*

For a while I had the intention to contact you, but after seeing today two notes published in *Indian BIRDS* about colour aberrations with rather incorrect information, I decided to write to you right

now. Most of the records of aberrantly coloured birds published in *Indian BIRDS* over the years are incorrectly identified (Table 1), although most of them quote van Grouw (2013) or van Grouw (2021). If you wish, I am happy to review any records of colour aberrations before publishing them.

Table 1. List of colour aberrations published in Indian BIRDS during 2020–24

Sl No.	Species	Reference	Claimed Aberration	Actual Aberration
1.	Eurasian Wigeon <i>Mareca penelope</i>	Choudhury (2023)	Suspected partial leucism	Brown.
2.	Red-crested Pochard <i>Netta rufina</i>	Sarkar et al. (2023)	Brown	A mutation with a similar effect as Brown (i.e., the melanin synthesis is affected, resulting in less synthesised melanin). Due to the inheritance of the mutation, it is highly unlikely to occur in the wild in male birds. However, without further info we cannot give this aberration a specific name.
3.	Lesser Flamingo <i>Phoeniconaias minor</i>	Jain et al. (2021)	Suspected melanism	Not a colour aberrant. Authors also suspected that the black colouration '... was an outcome of chemical toxins/ environmental contaminants.' This conclusion was quite sufficient as clearly evident based on the dirty, matted state of the plumage. Speculation about melanism was unnecessary.
4.	Eurasian Collared-Dove <i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	Islam et al. (2020)	Leucism	A form of Ino in combination with further sun-bleaching; a common aberration throughout the species range (van Grouw 2022). All the plumage is not white and only bleached. The black neck-ring and dark primaries clearly show that this bird is not white. The dark bill is also evidence that it is not leucistic.