

0800 h. At Dambuk Jongkhol VRF (SG), on 14 January 2023, a flock of 15 birds was observed feeding.

**Grey-headed Fish-Eagle *Ichthyophaga ichthyaetus*:** One sighting in a rubber plantation in Wagekhona (SG) on 11 January 2023, when a juvenile bird was sighted at approximately 0415 h [85]. This species is known from many areas in north-eastern India, such as Kaziranga National Park, where it is a common resident but is not known thus far from the Garo Hills.



Plybirth G Momin

85. A juvenile Grey-headed Fish-Eagle from Wagekhona, South Garo hills.

**Cachar Bulbul *Iole cacharensis*:** Heard at Baghmara (SG) on the evening of 09 June, 2022, approximately 1700 h and seen the next day. This endemic species was seen and heard in all the sites surveyed in South Garo in both summer and winter.

**Large Scimitar-Babbler *Erythrogonys hypoleucos*:** Two birds were recorded at Gaobari (SG) on 13 January 2023 at approximately 0930 h in a patch of dense mixed undergrowth with bamboo. One bird was seen well for close to five minutes, calling repeatedly.

**Brahminy Kite *Haliastur indus*:** One bird was observed on 16 January 2023 at Baghmara (SG) on the upward slope road at 0930 h. This species is rare in north-eastern India and more common in peninsular India south of the Ganges. However, this sighting is not completely unexpected, as it is reported in Bangladesh just across the border.

**Ashy/Swinhoe's Minivet *Pericrocotus divaricatus/cantonensis*:** Two birds were observed on 07 January 2023, 09 January 2023 and on 15 January 2023 feeding along with a flock of Rosy Minivets *P. roseus* in the Karwani section of Baghmara (SG). The noticeably browner body, a greyish brown rump unlike the paler grey rump of Ashy, and the white supercilium extending beyond the eye suggest that these could be Swinhoe's Minivets, which are listed as vagrants to the Indian subcontinent (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012), but a photograph could not be taken for conclusive proof.

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- **Maitreya Sukumar, Plybirth G Momin & John Fernando Dalbhoth**  
Maitreya Sukumar, E 24 Vasant Marg, Vasant Vihar, New Delhi 110057 Corresponding author:  
Email: [maitreya.sukumar@gmail.com](mailto:maitreya.sukumar@gmail.com)  
Plybirth G Momin, Sasatgre, Sakal-Aduma, West Garo Hills, Meghalaya 794002  
John Fernando Dalbhoth, Dambuk Aga, South Garo Hills Meghalaya 794102

## Eyebrowed Thrush *Turdus obscurus* from Uttarakhand in the Western Himalaya of India

On 14 February 2024, at approximately 1540 h, MR saw an unfamiliar greyish-brown thrush with a prominent white supercilium feeding on a heap of dung in village Pangot (29.420°N, 79.420°E; c.2,016 m asl) in Naina Devi Bird Conservation Reserve, Uttarakhand. The bird was feeding with Grey-winged Blackbird *Turdus bouboul* and Streaked Laughingthrush *Trochalopteron lineatum*. The bird was again seen in the same area by MR, feeding on the dung pile on 15 and 16 February at different times during the day. On 17 February 2024, MS and PK came across the bird at the same location at 0655 h. It was a medium-sized thrush with a greyish-brown head and face, strong white supercilium going behind the ear coverts, a prominent white crescent below the eye, dark lores, white sub-moustachial stripe, greyish throat and upper breast, black upper mandible, prominent yellow lower mandible with a black tip, pale orange flanks, white central belly and undertail coverts, greyish tail, and brownish grey upperparts with prominent white tips to the greater wing-coverts. The bird was feeding on a pile of dung in an open terraced field near human habitation along with a male Grey-winged Blackbird and a pair of Streaked Laughingthrushes and Himalayan Bulbuls *Pycnonotus leucogenys*. The bird was photographed [86] and identified as a sub-adult male Eyebrowed Thrush *Turdus obscurus*.



Manoj Sharma

86. Eyebrowed Thrush from Pangot, Nainital.

The Eyebrowed Thrush is a medium-sized monotypic thrush (Clement & Hathway 2000). It breeds in central and eastern Siberia, east to Kamchatka, south to northern Mongolia, Amurland, and Sakhalin, and winters in the northeastern Indian Subcontinent east to Taiwan, south to Greater Sundas and the Philippines (Collar 2020). In winter, it occurs from 2,300 m asl down to foothills, in open forests, groves, gardens, and open country (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). In the Indian subcontinent, the species winters mainly from Bhutan to Arunachal Pradesh, more commonly in the hills of northeast India in Assam and Meghalaya, south to Lushai Hills, Narcondam Island and South Andaman Island, north-eastern and south-eastern Bangladesh and has scattered winter records in the Himalaya from central Nepal eastwards. It also straggles to southern parts of the Indian Peninsula, Sri Lanka, and Maldives. According to eBird (2024), the species has consistently shown a tendency of vagrancy in recent times in parts of India, where it was not known to have occurred previously. It was recorded in West Bengal, where it was detected in Kolkata during November 2018, December 2018, and April 2023; in South 24 Parganas during April 2009 and September 2018; and in Sundarbans during October 2023 and November 2023 (eBird 2024). In Orissa, the species was recorded at Baleswar in January 2016, at Bhitarkanika in April 2018, and at Cuttack in February 2024 (eBird 2024). In the last ten years, the species has also occurred sporadically in parts of central and western India. The species was recorded in Gujarat at the Shoolpaneshwar Wildlife Sanctuary in March 2012 and in Junagadh in February 2013. It was recorded at Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh, in November 2023. In Maharashtra, the bird was recorded in Nagpur in April 2017, in Mumbai between January and March 2021, and in Pune in February 2016 and January 2024 (eBird 2024).

In the Himalaya, the species is distributed from central Nepal eastwards (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012; Collar 2020). In Nepal, the first mention of this species was by Biswas (1962), who referred to a single skin in the 'Hodgson Collection'. Redman et al. (1984) reported two birds, the only records to date from the Kathmandu valley, other than the specimen mentioned by Biswas (1962). However, there are recent eBird records of the species from the Kathmandu valley (Coker 2016; Bhusal 2021; Shrestha 2021; Tiwari 2021; Bhandari 2024; Shrestha 2024).

There are no known records of the species in the Himalaya westwards of central Nepal (Clement & Hathway 2000; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012; Collar 2020; eBird 2024). This species is also not mentioned in the Uttarakhand bird checklist (Mohan & Sondhi 2017). The present observation is the first record of this species from the state of Uttarakhand and the Western Himalaya.

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- **Manoj Sharma, Prashant Kumar & Mahesh Rajput**  
 Manoj Sharma, Village Shankarpur, Ramnagar, District Nainital, 244715, Uttarakhand, India. Email: [treewift@gmail.com](mailto:treewift@gmail.com) [MS] [Corresponding author]  
 Prashant Kumar, Dangwal Colony, Chilkiya, Ramnagar, Nainital District, 244715, Uttarakhand, India. Email: [birdlifeindia@gmail.com](mailto:birdlifeindia@gmail.com) [PK]  
 Mahesh Rajput, Village & Post Office Malah, Bharatpur, 321001, Rajasthan, India. Email: [natureguide1@asianadventures.in](mailto:natureguide1@asianadventures.in) [MR]

## Rufous-vented Grass Babbler *Laticilla burnesii* in Dudhwa Tiger Reserve, Uttar Pradesh, India: A curious midpoint of two populations across its range

Rufous-vented Grass Babbler *Laticilla burnesii* is a Near Threatened species primarily found in the grasslands of Pakistan and adjoining parts of north-western India, with another isolated population in eastern Nepal (Madge 2020; BirdLife International 2024). The species belongs to the family *Pellorneidae* and is the only one of two species of its genus, with the other being Swamp Grass Babbler *L. cinerascens*, which is found in the Brahmaputra River systems. The Rufous-vented Grass Babbler has two subspecies—the nominate subspecies from Pakistan and north-western India and the *nipalensis* subspecies recorded only from the Koshi Tappu Wildlife Sanctuary in eastern Nepal (Baral et al. 2007).

Rufous-vented Grass Babbler inhabits tall, alluvial, and seasonally inundated grassland patches along rivers that are mostly composed of *Saccharum spontaneum* and *S. munja* or reeds such as *Phragmites karka* and *Typha* (Showler & Davidson 1999; Madge 2020). These grasslands are often interspersed with *Acacia* trees and *Tamarisk* shrubs. In India, all of these habitats fall within the Indus River system, mostly in the state of Punjab, with vestigial populations in adjacent states (eBird 2024). However, the Ganga River system, which lies further east, also has vast stretches of alluvial grasslands (Shukla 2009) and hence has potential for grass babbler populations. The relatively unexplored riverine grasslands of the Sharda and Ghaghra Rivers (tributaries of Ganga) that fall within the jurisdiction of the Dudhwa and Pilibhit Tiger Reserves in Uttar Pradesh are home to many threatened grassland specialist birds, such as Bengal Florican *Houbaropsis bengalensis*, Jerdon's Babbler *Chrysomma altirostre*, and Swamp Francolin *Ortygornis gularis* (Javed & Rahmani 1998; Midha & Mathur 2010; Jha et al. 2018), which further indicate a greater likelihood of a grass babbler population.

As a part of the bird surveys conducted by 'The Habitats Trust' (THT) along the riverine grasslands of the Sharda River, we encountered Rufous-vented Grass Babblers at three locations over two days, recording four individuals altogether.

## Observations Sighting 1

On 19 April 2023, KS and PM conducted bird surveys in the Sharda