suggestive of movement, contrary to the assumption that they were residents. Further research and monitoring are necessary to better understand the seasonal dynamics and habitat utilization patterns of the Eastern Ghats Green Munia population.

In addition to the population found in Mt. Abu, Rajasthan, the Eastern Ghats population may be the only other viable population for Green Munias known today. The Eastern Ghats region, due to its poor accessibility, remains relatively unexplored, which could contribute to the limited knowledge about the distribution of the species in this region. Compounding this issue, several areas bordering Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, and Chhattisgarh are sensitive, imposing restrictions on general visits, including birdwatching.

As per the local people, decades ago, the Green Munias used to feed extensively in their "*podu*" cultivation (forest clearing by burning) decimating their crops. Upon engaging in discussions with elder residents of the area, it was revealed that they perceive the presence of Green Munias as a pest to their agricultural production. The measures taken to reduce their agricultural damage could have resulted in a decline/movement of their population in this region. Being aware of this population, a comprehensive solution encompassing community involvement through awareness and education, alongside research and monitoring, is imperative.

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Reflections from a survey of the Village Reserve Forests and Community Forests of Garo Hills, Meghalaya, north-eastern India

The states of north-eastern India are part of the Indo-Burmese biodiversity hotspot (Myers 2000). The region has among the highest avian biodiversity in the Oriental region, with over 850 species, many of which are forest dependent. In the Garo Hills of Meghalaya, the Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) helped the forest department of Meghalaya establish Village Reserved Forests (VRFs) and Community Forests (CFs) They are administered by the community with assistance from the WTI, Garo Hills District Council (GHADC), and Meghalaya State Forest Dept (SFD). We were a part of a bird survey conducted during May–June 2022 and January 2023 in the VRFs and CFs flanking the two National Parks in the Garo Hills: the Nokrek National Park in the West Garo Hills District and the Balpakram National Park in the South Garo Hills District. I share a few reflections on the habitats as well as some interesting species noted during these surveys.

The survey was conducted in two phases, with West Garo (WG) and South Garo (SG) surveyed in summer between 28 May 2022 and 15 June 2022 and a second phase in winter covering only South Garo between 07 January 2023 and 16 January 2023. Seven VRFs and two CFs were surveyed in West Garo. In South Garo, six VRFs and one CF were surveyed; in addition, a Reserve Forest (RF) and an extension of the RF were included in the South Garo surveys. All these locations were covered by walking along existing trails (Table 1).

The sites that were surveyed encompassed a range of forest

Table 1. List of sites surveyed in Garo hills

VRFs/CFs of West Garo Hills	VRFs/CFs of South Garo Hills
Daribok VRF	Baghmara RF
Sakal Aduma VRF	Halwa Ambeg VRF
Selbalgre VRF	Ampanggiri VRF
Chandigre VRF	DC Complex Road (RF Extension)
Baladinggre VRF	Panda VRF
Durakalakgre VRF	Wagekhona CF
Oragitok CF	Gaobari VRF
Sasatgre CF	Dambuk Atong VRF
Misimagre VRF	Dambuk Jongkhol VRF

types, ranging from primary forest to the jhum-mosaic landscape to areas near human habitation. It was interesting to note the preference of species groups for certain types of habitats. Among the frugivores (a group which in these forests includes hornbills, pigeons, barbets, flowerpeckers, and fairy bluebirds), the greatest number of species were observed in primary forests such as Baghmara and Ampanggiri (11 each). However, jhoom sites as well as sites close to human habitation had comparable numbers—nine species noted in Oragitok, which is a jhoom mosaic landscape, and eight in Chandigre, where the VRF is surrounded by human habitation. Hence, the presence of frugivores may be determined by the presence of fruiting trees rather than by whether the site was located within a forest or within a jhoom or human habitation. A similar pattern was observed for leaf gleaners (which in these forests include species such as babblers, laughingthrushes, *Phylloscopus* warblers, leafbirds, and cuckoos). Primary forest sites such as Halwa Ambeng and Baghmara had 22 and 21 species of this group, respectively, but comparable number of species were also observed in jhoom mosaic sites as well—Selbalgre and Oragitok had 19 and 18 species, respectively—while 18 species were noted in Chandigre. Leaf gleaner presence appears to be less driven by whether a forest is primary or secondary and instead may be determined by other factors, such as insect availability and well delineated forest strata. In regard to a group such as salliers (drongos, trogons, broadbills, flycatchers, niltavas, minivets, cuckooshrikes, and woodshrikes), while the highest numbers were reported in primary forests such as Halwa Ambeng and Baghmara (29 and 21 species, respectively), 16 species were observed in Gaobari, a site near human habitation. This may be due to the presence of good forest patches near the sites with human habitation, which offered refuge for the salliers. Jhoom landscapes had fewer numbers of this group.

The pattern was slightly different among certain other insectivores. The highest number of bark gleaners (a group which in these forests are mainly comprised of woodpeckers) were in primary forests at lower elevations with large trees, which are favoured by large woodpeckers, such as the forests of Halwa Ambeng and Baghmara, which have nine and eight species of bark gleaners, respectively. Halwa Ambeng also has good stands of bamboo, which provides good habitat for bamboo specialists such as White-browed Piculet *Sasia ochracea.* Other primary forests and forest types had fewer species.

Granivores, which in these VRFs includes forest-dwelling galliforms such as Red Junglefowl *Gallus gallus*, White-cheeked Partridge *Arborophila atrogularis*, and Grey Peacock-Pheasant *Polyplectron bicalcaratum*, as well as species such as Spotted Dove *Spilopelia chinensis,* Oriental Turtle Dove *Streptopelia orientalis*, White-rumped Munia *Lonchura striata*, and Eurasian Tree Sparrows *Passer montanus*, most species were reported within primary forests (five species in Baghmara and four in Halwa Ambeng). These sites had a forest floor with leaf litter and a largely closed canopy, which are preferred by strict forest dwellers such as White-cheeked Partridge, Grey Peacock-Pheasant, and Red Junglefowl to some extent. Four species in the group were also observed at a jhoom site, such as Oragitok, but these were generalist granivores, such as Spotted Dove, Oriental Turtle Dove, White-rumped Munia, and Red Junglefowl. These generalists also dominated the sightings of this group at sites near human habitation. Another category of insectivores, namely, ground-dwelling species such as pittas, robins, and thrushes, was absent from most sites, with the highest number of species, four, reported from a primary forest (Baghmara).

Stream side feeders, which in these forests includes species such as Black-backed *Enincurus immaculatus* and Slaty-backed Forktails *E. schistaceus*, and Blue-eared Kingfisher *Alcedo meninting* were absent from many sites. This could have been because the surveyed areas did not always have stream-side habitat. Only three species of this group were observed from Halwa Ambeng, a primary forest site, two from a degraded site (Sasatgre) and another two from a site near human habitation (Chandigre). The presence of this group again appears to be determined not by forest type but by the availability of a specific type of habitat.

All these observations are broad patterns, and a systematic study is needed to calculate the frequency and abundance of species that occur within the different forest categories and to ascertain which species are being impacted by the clearing of forests for jhoom or habitation. Given the number of species that were recorded in the VRFs and CFs over the course of the two short survey seasons and the fact that these forests act as a refuge for bird species outside of protected area networks, further systematic study is needed to understand the distribution of species across the Garo hills landscape.

Notable species

White-cheeked Partridge *Arborophila atrogularis:* First observed on 28 May 2022 at the Daribok VRF (WG) near Nokrek National Park at 0730 h, when a bird was flushed from the forest floor. Three birds were flushed from the forest floor at the Karwani section of Baghmara (SG) on 09 January 2023 at 0845 h and were also heard at Baladinggre (WG), as well as Halwa Ambeng, the DC complex road, and Baghmara on the upward slope road (all SGs).

Ashy-headed Green-Pigeon *Treron phayrei*: Observed on 29 May 2022, in Selbalgre VRF (WG), approximately 0500 h when a pair flew past. A fly past of 10 birds was also observed on 30 May 2022 in Chandigre (WG). On 03 June 2022, a fly past of 3–4 birds were observed in both Oragitok and Sasatgre (both WG) at 0600 h and 1600 h, respectively. In South Garo, one bird was observed on 09 June 2022, approximately 1530 h in Baghmara, and on the next day, at 1600 h at Halwa Ambeng, three birds were observed feeding on a fruiting tree; more birds were observed perched on branches further along the track. The species was noted at the same fruiting tree site on 11 and 12 June, 2022, and once on 10 January 2023 at 0800 h. Additionally, it was observed at Ampanggiri (SG) on 13 June, where five individuals were observed feeding along with a group of 15 Thick-billed Green-Pigeons *T. curvirostra*, at approximately

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

Grey-headed Fish-Eagle *Ichtyophaga 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 *Erythrogenys 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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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 boulboul* 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.