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Black-throated Parrotbill *Suthora nipalensis* from the East Khasi Hills, Meghalaya

On 21 April 2024, JB, MK, and RS were birdwatching along the Mawkdok Dympep Valley while traveling towards Sohra. At around 1100 h, we reached Khatarshnong Laitkroh (25.393°N, 91.766°E; 1780 m asl), where a flock of small birds grabbed our attention. The birds were observed and photographed [181]. They were Black-throated Parrotbill *Suthora nipalensis*. Identification was straightforward as no other similar-looking species exists. They were feeding on small seeds in a mixed flock with Green-tailed Sunbirds *Aethopyga nipalensis* and Whiskered Yuhinas *Yuhina flavicollis* (Baishya 2024). There were ten Black-throated Parrotbills in the flock. We observed these restless birds for about five minutes before they flew out of sight down the hill. The weather was sunny, and the sky was clear, with a temperature of 23°C. The habitat was subtropical broadleaf forest. The birds were foraging on bamboo and small seeding bushes.

The Black-throated Parrotbill is found in the Central and Eastern Himalaya and adjoining Southeast Asia. This species is variable across its large range, and ten subspecies are recognized, with six occurring in the Indian subcontinent (Robson 2023). The race that is extant over much of its range in Northeast India (excluding Mizoram and possibly southern Manipur) is the grey-breasted form named *poliotis*. This race is distinctively marked with grey cheeks and breast. The birds we saw had grey cheeks and breasts that matched the *poliotis* subspecies.

Our sighting is the first report of this species in eBird from Meghalaya, and we did not find any other recent records from Meghalaya on the internet. Historical literature and records show this species is known to occur in Meghalaya. According to Blyth (1851), the type locality for this race is Cherrapunji in the Khasi Hills. He considered it a full species, 'Grey-breasted Parrotbill' *Suthora poliotis*. It was subsequently reported in historical checklists for the Khasi Hills and Meghalaya (Stuart Baker 1907; Stuart Baker 1923; Mazumdar & Roy 1995). Stewart G. collected eggs of "*Paradoxornis nipalensis*" (older taxonomy) from the

Khasi Hills in 1905 (Vertnet 2024a). Walter Koelz collected multiple specimens of this species from the Khasi Hills between 1949 & 1952 (Vertnet 2024b).

The lack of recent sightings of this species in Meghalaya is probably due to habitat destruction and hunting. However, with increased birdwatching and conservation awareness in the region, there is hope that species known to occur but lacking recent records will continue to be discovered, thereby offering hope for their recovery. This region has faced substantial habitat destruction from agriculture, mining, and timber extraction. This highlights the critical need for intensified conservation efforts to preserve the region's rich biodiversity.



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181. Black-throated Parrotbill from East Khasi Hills.

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