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- Pradeep Singh & Raju Vyas
Pradeep Singh, Naturalist and Expedition Leader, India.
Email: kokpradeepsingh@hotmail.com [PS]
Raju Vyas, Sashwat Apartment, BPC-Haveli Road, near Splatter Studio, Alkapuri, Vadodara 390007, Gujarat, India. Email: razoovyas@gmail.com [RV] [Corresponding author]

Three additions to the avifauna of the Union Territory of Ladakh, India

Oriental Pratincole *Glareola maldivarum* from Hanley Wetland Complex

During a butterfly survey organized by GoI-UNDP-GEF SECURE Himalaya Project from 11–20 August 2023 in eastern Ladakh, I photographed a bird in flight near the Ragar marshes (32.756°N, 78.958°E; 4,301 m asl), in the Hanley Wetland Complex on 15 August at 0724 h in the morning. Although my initial impression was that of the commonly occurring Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*, I left the area without reviewing my photos properly and identifying the bird correctly. After reaching Rumtse village (33.628°N, 77.759°E; 4,208 m asl) on 19 August, I was able to review my photos on the computer and noticed some reddish tinge on the underwings. Careful examination of the bird's bill length, tail length and pattern in the photos, led me to eliminate Green Sandpiper which was structurally very different from the bird I had photographed. I deduced the bird to be a pratincole *Glareola* spp., and after forwarding the images to Ashwin Viswanathan, it was suggested that the bird could be an Oriental Pratincole *G. maldivarum*. The absence of white trailing edge to the secondaries and the shallow tail-fork (Grimmett et al. 2011)—features that were visible in the photograph [227]—eliminated the similar looking Collared Pratincole *G. pratincola*. While Collared Pratincole has been reported from a single sighting

in the Upper Indus Valley between Choglamsar and Thiksey in spring of 1982 (Delany et al. 2017), there are no recent records of Oriental Pratincole from Ladakh (Pfister 2014; Sharma et al. 2021; eBird 2024). However, this species is listed in a historical checklist for the region but without any details or location (Ward 1907), and thus it cannot be ascertained whether the report was from Ladakh or Jammu & Kashmir.



227. Oriental Pratincole at Ragar marshes.

Padma Gyalpo

Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica* from Tsokar Wetland Complex

Tsokar Lake (33.301°N, 78.001°E; 4,530 m asl) is a Ramsar site in eastern Ladakh, and an Important Bird Area (IBA) that serves as the breeding site of species such as Bar-headed Goose *Anser indicus*, Brown-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus brunnicephalus*, and the State bird of Ladakh – the Black-necked Crane *Grus nigricollis* among many other species. During the autumn season from mid-August to mid-September, the number of species near and around the lake is augmented by the presence of passage migrant birds and several rare birds can be seen during this time. With the hope to find some lesser-known passage migrants, I went birding at Tsokar Lake on 08 September 2023. At 0911 h, near Newul Hamlet (33.323°N, 78.039°E; 4,529 m asl), I photographed a godwit *Limosa* spp. which was seen feeding on the shoreline alongside Common Redshanks *T. totanus* and Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii*. Initially the bird could not be identified properly due to the heat haze which led to blurry photographs. Then after a while when the bird took off and flew some distance away before landing again to forage, I was able to take few photographs in flight. The photograph [228] clearly revealed a barred tail and a white V-shape on the back, eliminating the regular passage migrant Black-tailed Godwit *L. limosa*. The slightly upturned bi-colored bill also helped in elimination of Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*, Whimbrel *N. phaeopus*, and Asian Dowitcher *Limnodromus semipalmatus* all of which look similar in appearance from the back in flight. More images are available in Gyalpo (2023a). Although the Dowitcher has not yet been reported from Ladakh, both Eurasian Curlew and Whimbrel are common passage migrant birds and can be seen in the Tsokar wetland complex during August and September (Chamba 2022; Gyalpo 2024). Subsequent to my sighting, there was another record near the same area, on 10 September 2023, possibly the same bird, but without any photos (Norboo 2023). There is one previous record of the species listed in an old report (Gautam et al. 2007), but without any supporting documentation or photographs, and thus rendering the latter two records unconfirmed. Apart from these two unconfirmed records, there

are no other reports of Bar-tailed Godwit either from Ladakh or from any other States covering Himalayan or Trans-Himalayan regions (eBird 2024).



228. Bar-tailed Godwit at Tsokar Lake.

Black-faced Bunting *Emberiza spodocephala* from Spitik Marshes

On 11 November 2023, while birding in the Spitik Marshes (34.121°N, 77.521°E; 3,202 m asl), with Sudeshna Dey and Harish Thangaraj, I photographed a bird perched deep in willow *Salix* sp. trees in the area at 0430 h, but it did not give a clear view. It seemed timid and shy perhaps due to the presence of White-winged Redstarts *Phoenicurus erythrogastrus* in the same habitat, which showed a tendency for mobbing this particular bird whenever it came out in the open. After showing the pictures to my fellow birders, we agreed it to be a Black-faced Bunting *Emberiza spodocephala*. After a few attempts, I managed to get a few clear pictures. Visible characteristics, such as, greyish upper breast with lower underparts yellow, brownish mantle with black streaks, greyish head and nape with dark lores and chin, and a pinkish bill, were observed. A clear photograph [229] was achieved on 25 November at the same location (Gyalpo 2023b). The bird was observed throughout the winter season at this location regularly, evident from various checklists from the same area (eBird 2024c), from the first day of the sighting on 11 November 2023 till the last sighting on 25 April 2024 (Phuntsog 2024). This observation appears to be the eastern-most wintering record of this species in South Asia (eBird 2024d).



229. Black-faced Bunting at Spitik marshes.

The above three species are not listed or mentioned in any of the standard references (Osmaston 1925, 1926; Sillem 1934; Vaurie 1972; Holmes 1986; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012; Delany et al. 2014; Pfister 2014; Grimmett et al. 2011; Sharma

et al. 2021) making these records new additions to the avifauna of Ladakh.

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– Padma Gyalpo

Padma Gyalpo, Choldan House, Shey, Ladakh, India. Email: gyalpo4086@gmail.com

A Rufous Sibia *Heterophasia capistrata* from Upper Assam

On 15 May 2024, while bird watching in the Dulung Reserve Forest (27.445°N, 94.213°E; 126 m asl) of Lakhimpur District of Upper Assam, India, we observed a bird that had rufous underparts, a black head, and a long tail with grey tips, and black subterminal band. The bird was sitting alone on a branch of a tall flowering tree, c. 10 m above the ground. We observed it for 20 minutes, and we were able to take a few photographs [230–231] before it flew away. By matching the photographs with Grimmett