

# Taxonomic updates to the checklists of the birds of India and the South Asian region—2025

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## Introduction

This is the tenth annual taxonomic update to the checklists of birds of India, the Indian Subcontinent, and the South Asian<sup>1</sup> region after Praveen et al. (2016). Since our last update (Praveen & Jayapal 2024), there have been single revisions each in the IOC taxonomy (Gill et al. 2024) and the eBird/Clements (Clements et al. 2024). However, after the last revision, we decided to align more closely with eBird/Clements in both taxonomy and nomenclature, and IOC updates, therefore, do not significantly impact our checklist. In this version, we have updated the extended fields of the checklists in accordance with the taxonomic revisions effected here. We also revisit the definitions of ‘vagrant’ and ‘historical record’ to make them more contemporary for our user clientele and we introduce the practice of summarizing the bird statistics for India in terms of number of ‘regular’ species as separate from number of vagrants and historical records<sup>2</sup>.

## Methodology

In this update, we complete our transition to the eBird/Clements backbone taxonomy and we shall no longer be following IOC updates. However, there still are discrepancies in the ‘species authority’ field between our Checklist and eBird/Clements (see Praveen J & Jayapal 2023; Praveen & Jayapal 2024); in each case, we have reviewed the currently available evidences that tend to support our claims and we have also communicated the same to eBird/Clements for their consideration. In continuation of our core language policy, we retain the Oxford spellings for variously spelt English words (like grey versus gray, and colour versus color) in the English names of birds (*contra* eBird/Clements). We also reviewed the use of eponyms in English names and have made a partial move to non-eponym names where they were readily available in eBird/Clements (e.g., Tawny Lark for Sykes’s Lark *Galerida deva*). We also embrace two popular group-names from eBird/Clements; ‘Bluetail’ for some *Tarsiger* spp., and ‘Cupwing’ for *Pnoepyga* spp.

With this update we make two important changes to our existing definitions of ‘historical’ and ‘vagrant’ species for the India Checklist.

**HISTORICAL:** We had originally defined it as “a native species, whether resident (e.g., Himalayan Quail *Ophrysia superciliosa*), or migratory (e.g., Siberian Crane *Leucogeranus leucogeranus*), which has not been reliably reported from India since 01 January,

1950” (Praveen et al. 2019). The cut-off period for considering a record as ‘historical’ is now revised as 01 January, 2000.

**Rationale for change:** The previous threshold of the year 1950 (immediately after India’s independence) has outlived its purpose, as a defining moment for modern Indian ornithology, with the exponential growth of birding in the country as a serious activity over the last two decades and consequent spurt in species discoveries and range expansion reports. It is, therefore, prudent to have a closer cut-off for this definition and the year 2000 is selected as it marks an important transitional period for Indian ornithology, with the publication of two modern field guides (Grimmett et al. 1998; Kazmierczak 2000), a modern checklist (Manakadan & Pittie 2001), as well as the launch of a number of Internet-based mailing lists for birders. Hence, it is befitting that the last 25 years of the new millennium be considered ‘current’ for Indian ornithology and henceforth, all exclusive records that antedate 2000 be treated as historical.

**VAGRANT:** Originally defined as “an extralimital species, migratory or otherwise, that has been reliably reported fewer than ten times from India” (Praveen et al. 2019), we now re-define ‘vagrant’ as an extralimital migratory species that has been reliably reported in fewer than *ten* years since 01 January 2000. When a species transitions to the vagrant category or vice versa, we shall review the actual reports. This is to eliminate special situations where the same report in consecutive years is incorrectly counted as two, or reports from two different migratory seasons in the same year is incorrectly treated as one.

**Rationale for change:** The current definition of a vagrant is found to be seriously inadequate, as ten records seem to be so low a threshold for many true vagrants to be easily mislabelled as ‘regular’ in Indian avifauna. With rapid growth in the number of competent birders and bird photographers in recent years and the vast expanse of the geographical area of the country, more and more observations of vagrancy and eruption in otherwise extralimital species are being documented, with number of reports quickly reaching ten—the upper limit for a vagrant to be elevated to ‘regular’. Sometimes, it is also a challenging task to corroborate how ‘independent’ multiple reports of a vagrant species are from a region or landscape. Considering these factors, we move away from a threshold that counts ‘number of independent records’ of the species to that of ‘number of years’ during which the species has been reported. It is to be noted that the base year for vagrant report (i.e., 2000) would also move up a year with each annual update being published.

<sup>1</sup> South Asia additionally includes Afghanistan and Chagos Archipelago.

<sup>2</sup> The changes in taxonomy shall be effectuated from the first issue of the 21<sup>st</sup> volume of *Indian BIRDS*

**Table 1.** Taxonomic updates and nomenclatural changes to the checklists of the birds of India, and the South Asian region

S. No.	English name	Scientific name	Notes on taxonomy / nomenclature	Type of change
1	Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo	<i>Chalcites basalis</i> (Horsfield, 1821)	Genus <i>Chalcites</i> split from <i>Chrysococcyx</i> based on the recommendations of Working Group Avian Checklists (hereinafter, WGAC) of the International Ornithological Union.	Genus split
2	Frogmouths	Podargiformes	Order Podargiformes split from Caprimulgiformes based on recommendations of Chen et al. (2019) and WGAC	Order split
3	Swifts	Apodiformes	Order Apodiformes split from Caprimulgiformes based on recommendations of Chen et al. (2019) and WGAC	Order split
4	Demoiselle Crane	<i>Anthropoides virgo</i> (Linnaeus, 1758)	Genus <i>Anthropoides</i> split from <i>Grus</i> based on recommendations from Krajewski et al. (2010) and WGAC.	Genus split
5	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Thinornis dubius</i> (Scopoli, 1786)	Genus <i>Thinornis</i> split from <i>Charadrius</i> based on recommendations from Černý & Natale (2022) and WGAC.	Genus split
6	Long-billed Plover	<i>Thinornis placidus</i> (Gray & Gray, 1863)	As above.	Genus split
7	Mongolian Gull	<i>Larus mongolicus</i> Sushkin, 1925	Species split from <i>Larus smithsonianus</i> sensu lato following recommendations of WGAC.	Extralimital split
8	Black Bittern	<i>Botaurus flavicollis</i> (Latham, 1790)	Genus <i>Ixobrychus</i> lumped with <i>Botaurus</i> based on the recommendations of Chesser et al. (2024) and WGAC.	Genus lump
9	Cinnamon Bittern	<i>Botaurus cinnamomeus</i> (Gmelin, 1789)	As above.	Genus lump
10	Schrenck's Bittern	<i>Botaurus eurhythmus</i> (Swinhoe, 1873)	As above.	Genus lump
11	Little Bittern	<i>Botaurus minutus</i> (Linnaeus, 1766)	As above.	Genus lump
12	Yellow Bittern	<i>Botaurus sinensis</i> (Gmelin, 1789)	As above.	Genus lump
13	Western Cattle-Egret	<i>Ardea ibis</i> Linnaeus, 1758	Genus <i>Bubulcus</i> lumped with <i>Ardea</i> based on the recommendations of Chesser et al. (2024) and WGAC.	Genus lump
14	Eastern Cattle-Egret	<i>Ardea coromanda</i> (Boddaert, 1783)	As above.	Genus lump
15	Crested Goshawk	<i>Lophospiza trivirgata</i> (Temminck, 1824)	Genus <i>Lophospiza</i> split from <i>Accipiter</i> based on recommendations from Catanach et al. (2024) and WGAC.	Genus split
16	Besra	<i>Tachyspiza virgata</i> (Temminck, 1822)	Genus <i>Tachyspiza</i> split from <i>Accipiter</i> based on recommendations from Catanach et al. (2024) and WGAC.	Genus split
17	Japanese Sparrowhawk	<i>Tachyspiza gularis</i> (Temminck & Schlegel, 1844)	As above.	Genus split
18	Shikra	<i>Tachyspiza badia</i> (Gmelin, 1788)	As above.	Genus split
19	Nicobar Sparrowhawk	<i>Tachyspiza butleri</i> (Gurney, 1898)	As above.	Genus split
20	Levant Sparrowhawk	<i>Tachyspiza brevipes</i> (Severtsov, 1850)	As above.	Genus split
21	Chinese Sparrowhawk	<i>Tachyspiza soloensis</i> (Horsfield, 1821)	As above.	Genus split
22	Northern Goshawk	<i>Astur gentilis</i> (Linnaeus, 1758)	Genus <i>Astur</i> split from <i>Accipiter</i> based on recommendations from Catanach et al. (2024) and WGAC.	Genus split
23	Eastern Barn Owl	<i>Tyto javanica</i> (Gmelin, 1788)	Species split from Barn Owl <i>Tyto alba</i> sensu lato, following recommendations of WGAC with a new English name	Extralimital split & English name change
24	Indian Cuckooshrike	<i>Coracina macei</i> (Lesson, 1831)	New English name for <i>Coracina macei</i> sensu stricto following the split of Oriental Cuckooshrike <i>C. javensis</i> from Large Cuckooshrike <i>C. macei</i> sensu lato following recommendations of WGAC.	English name change

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25	Oriental Cuckooshrike	<i>Coracina javensis</i> (Horsfield, 1821)	Species split from Large Cuckooshrike <i>Coracina macei</i> sensu lato, following recommendations of WGAC.	Species split & English name change
26	Spotted Nutcracker	<i>Nucifraga hemispila</i> Vigors, 1831	Species split from Spotted Nutcracker <i>Nucifraga caryocatactes</i> sensu lato following recommendations of WGAC.	Extralimital split
27	Eurasian Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i> (Linnaeus, 1758)	Genus <i>Coloeus</i> split from <i>Corvus</i> based on the recommendations of WGAC.	Genus split
28	Jerdon's Bushlark	<i>Plocealauda affinis</i> (Blyth, 1845)	Genus <i>Plocealauda</i> split from <i>Mirafra</i> based on the recommendations of Alström et al. (2023) and WGAC.	Genus split
29	Indian Bushlark	<i>Plocealauda erythroptera</i> (Blyth, 1845)	As above.	Genus split
30	Bengal Bushlark	<i>Plocealauda assamica</i> (Horsfield, 1840)	As above.	Genus split
31	Pacific Swallow	<i>Hirundo javanica</i> Sparman, 1789	Species split from <i>Hirundo tahitica</i> sensu lato following recommendations of WGAC.	Extralimital split
32	European Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis rufula</i> (Temminck, 1835)	Species split from Red-rumped Swallow <i>Cecropis daurica</i> sensu lato following recommendations of WGAC.	Species split & English name change
33	Eastern Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis daurica</i> (Laxmann, 1769)	New English name for <i>Cecropis daurica</i> sensu stricto following the split of European Red-rumped Swallow <i>C. rufula</i> and the lump of Striated Swallow <i>C. striolata</i> following recommendations of WGAC.	Species lump & English name change
34	Nicobar Bulbul	<i>Hypsipetes nicobariensis</i> Moore, 1854	Genus change from <i>Ixos</i> to <i>Hypsipetes</i> following recommendations of Goyal et al. (2023) and WGAC.	Genus change
35	Great Parrotbill	<i>Paradoxornis aemodius</i> (Hodgson, 1841)	Genus lump of <i>Cholornis</i> with <i>Paradoxornis</i> based on the recommendations of Cai et al. (2019) and WGAC.	Genus change
36	Brown Parrotbill	<i>Paradoxornis unicolor</i> (Hodgson, 1843)	Genus lump of <i>Cholornis</i> with <i>Paradoxornis</i> based on the recommendations of Cai et al. (2019) and WGAC.	Genus lump
37	Grey-headed Parrotbill	<i>Paradoxornis gularis</i> Gray, 1845	Genus lump of <i>Psittiparus</i> with <i>Paradoxornis</i> based on the recommendations of Cai et al. (2019) and WGAC.	Genus lump
38	White-breasted Parrotbill	<i>Paradoxornis ruficeps</i> Blyth, 1842	As above.	Genus lump
39	Rufous-headed Parrotbill	<i>Paradoxornis bakeri</i> (Hartert, 1900)	As above.	Genus lump
40	Rufous-fronted Babbler	<i>Cyanoderma rufifrons</i> (Hume, 1873)	Species lump of Buff-chested Babbler <i>Cyanoderma ambiguum</i> with <i>Cyanoderma rufifrons</i> EL following recommendations of WGAC with a new English name.	Extralimital lump & English name change.
41	Spotted Creepers	Salpornithidae	Family split from Certhiidae (Tree-creepers) following recommendations of Oliveros et al. (2019), Imfeld et al. (2024), and WGAC.	Family split
42	Sri Lanka Shama	<i>Copsychus leggei</i> (Whistler, 1941)	Split from White-rumped Shama <i>Copsychus malabaricus</i> sensu lato, following recommendations of WGAC.	Species split
43	Hainan Blue Flycatcher	<i>Cyornis hainanus</i> (Ogilvie-Grant, 1900)	Regionally occurring subspecies <i>dialilaemus</i> moved from Blue-throated Flycatcher <i>Cyornis rubeculoides</i> to Hainan Blue Flycatcher <i>Cyornis hainanus</i> following recommendations of Singh et al. (2020) and WGAC.	Species change
44	Thick-billed Flowerpecker	<i>Pachyglossa agilis</i> (Tickell, 1833)	Genus <i>Pachyglossa</i> split from <i>Dicaeum</i> based on the recommendations of Nyári et al. (2009) and WGAC.	Genus split
45	Yellow-vented Flowerpecker	<i>Pachyglossa chrysorrhea</i> (Temminck, 1829)	As above.	Genus split
46	Yellow-bellied Flowerpecker	<i>Pachyglossa melanozantha</i> Blyth, 1843	As above.	Genus split
47	Legge's Flowerpecker	<i>Pachyglossa vincens</i> (Sclater, 1872)	As above.	Genus split

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48	Buff-bellied Pipit	<i>Anthus japonicus</i> Temminck & Schlegel, 1847	Species split from American Pipit <i>Anthus rubescens</i> sensu lato following recommendations of WGAC.	Extralimital split
49	Grey-crowned Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis caniceps</i> Vigors, 1831	Species split from European Goldfinch <i>Carduelis carduelis</i> sensu lato following recommendations of WGAC with a new English name.	Extralimital split & English name change

**Table 2.** A taxonomic summary of the checklists of South Asia, Indian Subcontinent, and India

Region	South Asia	Indian Subcontinent	India		
			Regular	Vagrant	Historical
Order	28	28	27	1	0
Family	117	117	111	4	1
Genus	520	514	465	28	8
Species	1467	1450	1210	134	29

Another major change with this update pertains to the communication of bird statistics. We, no longer, state the total number of bird species reported from India. Henceforth, we are inclined to report the total number of the 'regularly occurring' species, as separate from number of vagrants and historical species. This is important, particularly for conservation plans, policy decisions, database management, and scientific analyses to not inflate the country's avifauna, as 'vagrant' and 'historical' taxa do not contribute much to the biodiversity value of the country and they are disproportionately reported more in birds, compared to other taxa owing to the size of the active birding community. We believe that this practice would also impart some stability in bird statistics of the country. Currently, this change is done only for the India Checklist, where these categories are explicitly defined and classified, and not for the Indian Subcontinent or South Asia lists. We shall also publish different categories of the India Checklist as text including a brief summary of the results to enable web crawlers and database managers to obtain this information quickly.

## Results

In this update (Table 1), three new species have been added to the checklists following taxonomic splits in the regionally occurring forms of species. One regionally occurring species has been lumped with another; six changes involve extralimital splits that result in a change in the specific epithet of the regional form; and one is an extralimital lump. In addition, genera have changed for 33 species, including both lumps and splits. We have also made one family level split and two order level splits. As stated above, with this update, the taxonomic sequence and scientific names of birds in both, the India Checklist, and eBird/Clements have been completely aligned with each other. However, there are still seven instances wherein the year of description in 'species authority' field in the India Checklist differs from eBird/Clements (see Praveen J & Jayapal 2023; Praveen & Jayapal 2024). We found that the data in the India Checklist are in order in line with the rules of the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature (ICZN) and we have communicated the same to eBird/Clements for their consideration.

We continue to use English names that maintain a nomenclature that is largely stable and familiar to the local birding community, yet alive to current global usage and taxonomy. Primary English names of seven species have been changed due to taxonomic rearrangements. In addition, the English names of an additional 32 species have now been aligned with eBird/Clements.

With all these changes and updates, the total number of bird species now stands at 1,467 for South Asia and 1,450 for the Indian Subcontinent; for India, it is 1,210 regularly occurring species with 134 vagrants and 29 historical species in addition (Table 2).

### List of Historical Species with year of last report in parentheses:

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor* (1897), Pink-headed Duck\* *Rhodonessa caryophyllacea* (1935), Green Peafowl\* *Pavo muticus* (1928), Japanese Quail *Coturnix japonica* (1923), Himalayan Quail\* *Ophrysia superciliosa* (1876), Manipur Bush Quail\* *Perdicula manipurensis* (1932), Pallas's Sandgrouse *Syrhaptes paradoxus* (1924), Pin-tailed Sandgrouse *Pterocles alchata* (1902), European Turtle-Dove *Streptopelia turtur* (1982), Little Bustard *Tetrax tetrax* (1910), Red Kite *Milvus milvus* (1994), Masked Finfoot\* *Heliopais personatus* (1910), Great Snipe *Gallinago media* (1933), Swinhoe's Snipe *Gallinago megala* (1912), White-faced Storm-Petrel *Pelagodroma marina* (1964), Black-bellied Storm-Petrel *Fregatta tropica* (1960), Barau's Petrel *Pterodroma barau* (1985), Rufous-backed Dwarf-Kingfisher *Ceyx rufidorsa* (1909), Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus* (1880), Eurasian Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus* (1936), Azure Tit *Cyanistes cyanus* (1930), Clicking Shrike-Babbler *Pteruthius intermedius* (1950), Collared Myna *Acridotheres albocinctus* (1945), Chinese Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus yunnanensis* (1951), Claudia's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus claudiae* (1950), Manchurian Bush Warbler *Horornis canturians* (1955), Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus* (1990), White's Thrush *Zoothera aurea* (1987), and Sillem's Rosefinch *Carpodacus sillemi* (1929). Of these 29 species, five resident species are marked with an asterisk (\*), signifying possible local extinctions (SolB 2023).

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