

- Kazmierczak, K., Undeland, P., Allen, D., & Singh, R., 1998. Birdwatching areas: Harike Bird Sanctuary, Punjab State, India. *Oriental Bird Club Bulletin*. 27: 42–46.
- Kumar, A., Mehta, H. S., Mahabal, A., Lal, M., Nautiyal, A. K., & Sharma, G., 2006. Class: Aves (pp. 717-744). In: *Biodiversity in the Shivalik ecosystem of Punjab*. Jerath, N., Puja, & Chadha. J. (eds.). Dehra Dun: Bishen Singh Mahendra Pal Singh.
- Perennou, C., Rose, P. & Poole, C., 1990. Asian Waterfowl Census 1990. Mid-winter waterfowl counts in southern and eastern Asia, January 1990. IWRB/AWB.
- Pittie, A., 2024. Bibliography of South Asian Ornithology. Webpage URL: <http://www.southasiaornith.in> [Accessed on 14 July 2024].
- Prakash, V., Mahapatra, K. K., & Chaturvedi, N., 1997. *Species composition, population and distribution of aquatic birds in Harike Wildlife Sanctuary, Punjab*. Mumbai: Bombay Natural History Society. pp. 1–15.
- Rasmussen, P. C., & Anderton, J. C., 2012. *Birds of South Asia: the Ripley guide*. 2nd ed. Washington, D.C., and Barcelona: Smithsonian Institution and Lynx Edicions. 2 vols. pp. 1–378; 1–683.
- Robson, C. 1997. From the Field: India. *Oriental Bird Club Bulletin*. 26: 60–61.
- Singh, G., 1993. *A checklist of birds of Punjab*. Chandigarh: Department of Forests & Wildlife, Punjab. pp. 1–34.

– Gurpartap Singh & Pushkar Bali

Gurpartap Singh, 1969, Sector 64, Mohali 160062, Punjab, India.

E-mail: [prof.gurpartap.singh@gmail.com](mailto:prof.gurpartap.singh@gmail.com) [GS]

Pushkar Bali, 689-A, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Celestia Grand, Omaxe Phase-I,

New Chandigarh 140901, Punjab, India.

E-mail: [p.bali28@gmail.com](mailto:p.bali28@gmail.com) [PB]

### Some significant avian records from Majuli Island, Assam

The Majuli Island (26.996°N, 93.243°E, c.80 m asl) is a large river island of c.352 sq. km, bounded in the south by the Brahmaputra River and in the north by the Subansiri River and Kherkatia Suti (a small channel of River Brahmaputra in Assam, India). The island was assessed as an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA) in 2004 and as a Biodiversity Heritage Site (BHS) in 2019 (Islam & Rahmani 2004; Assam State Biodiversity Board 2019). The Majuli Island is covered by agricultural fields, wetlands, and grasslands, interspersed by a few woodlands (BirdLife International 2023a). Majuli Island and its adjacent riverine tracts is a district as per the government of Assam. In this article, we report the sighting of some important bird species previously not reported from the island.

#### Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*

The Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola* is an IUCN Vulnerable species (BirdLife International 2024b) that has been previously reported in Assam from Orang National Park, Dibru-Saikhowa National Park, Sibasagar District, and Neemati Wetlands of Jorhat District (Choudhury 1991; Talukdar 1996; eBird 2024a). In Majuli, it was seen in 2020 and 2021 in a flat sandy bank of a braided channel of the Brahmaputra River near Darbar Chapori (26.913°N, 94.175°E). Three individuals were encountered on 28 November 2020 at 1525 h, feeding with other waders in a muddy area. The following year, one individual was seen on 26 November at the exact location, feeding close to the river channel. Both times, the species was ignored in the field as they looked very similar to the Pacific Golden Plover *P. fulva*, a regular wintering species in Majuli. They were correctly identified only recently when we noticed the distinctive black armpits and white rump (Poole et al. 2020) while reviewing photographs on the computer [216]. The area was also surveyed in 2022 and 2023, but the species was not observed, likely due to the presence of newly grown grassy vegetation, particularly *Saccharum spontaneum* and *Typha sp.* Easily mistaken for the more common Pacific Golden Plover, we encourage birdwatchers to observe carefully to help determine its status in Assam.



216. Grey Plover from Majuli. Photographed by Shyamal Saikia.

#### Long-billed Plover *Charadrius placidus*

The Long-billed Plover *Charadrius placidus* is a wader that mostly prefers stony banks of fast-flowing rivers and can also be found in mudflats and fields (Grimmett et al. 2011; Wiersma et al. 2020). On 18 January 2024 at about 1510 h, two Long-billed Plovers were encountered while counting waders near the Bhreki Beel (26.935°N, 94.141°E), a large wetland of Majuli. Both were seen foraging with other waders on the edge of the wetland. They looked superficially like the Little Ringed Plover *C. dubius* but had a larger bill, lighter upper parts, slower movements, larger size, and longer legs [217]. Choudhury (2012) mentions Long-billed Plover from Majuli with no specific details or photos. This is the first photographic record from Majuli.



217. Long-billed Plover, Majuli.

#### Mongolian Short-toed Lark *Calandrella dukhunensis*

On 12 April 2024 at 0911 h, a Mongolian Short-toed Lark *Calandrella dukhunensis* was observed in the Darbar Chapori grassland (26.916°N, 94.169°E). It was feeding on the ground in an open area, and we managed to photograph it [218]. It initially appeared to be a Hume's Short-toed Lark *C. acutirostris*. However, after reviewing the photographs, it was confirmed to be a Mongolian Short-toed Lark due to its pale and short bill (yellow and long in Hume's Short-toed Lark) and more contrasting facial pattern, including a prominent supercilium. In north-eastern India, this species has previously been reported in the Kamrup, Tinsukia, and Baksa districts of Assam, with a few sightings in the West Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh (eBird 2024b). Most reports occur in April, with a few in October, indicating the species is a passage migrant in this region. The individual we encountered was likely on its migration to its breeding grounds.



218. Mongolian Short-toed Lark, Majuli.

### Bristled Grassbird *Schoenicola striatus*

The Bristled Grassbird *Schoenicola striatus* is an IUCN Vulnerable species (BirdLife International 2024c), that is a breeding visitor to the Brahmaputra plains of Assam. It has been recorded from protected areas such as Manas National Park, Kaziranga National Park, Dibru Saikhowa National Park, and Orang National Park, as well as scattered wetlands in Kamrup, Nagaon, Dhemaji districts (Choudhury 2000; Joshi et al. 2014; Rahmani 2023; eBird 2024c). Our first encounter was with a male Bristled Grassbird on 18 April 2024 at 1540 h, while surveying for grassland birds in the Darbar Chapori (26.915°N, 94.170°E). The bird was first seen singing in flight for about a minute as it flew over several patches of grass—this behaviour is consistent with its known flight display (Krishnan 2021)—then landed on a nearby exposed perch and vocalized for another minute. The bird was identified based on its vocalizations and photographs [219]. In the following days, two more males were seen in nearby areas, one c.500 m (26.918°N, 94.177°E) and another c.2 km away (26.929°N, 94.179°E) from the location of the first individual. All three sites were dominated by *Saccharum spontaneum* interspersed by *Typha* sp., *Tamarix* sp., and *Ziziphus mauritiana*. No individuals were found in *Phragmites karka* grassland even after several surveys using playback.



Ali: Shyamal Saikia

219. Bristled Grassbird perched on *Saccharum spontaneum*, Majuli.

### Chestnut-crowned Bush Warbler *Cettia major*

On 10 December 2023 at 1555 h, while birdwatching in Bhareki Beel (26.935°N, 94.141°E), we played the song of Chestnut-crowned Bush Warbler *Cettia major* to check for its presence. After about a minute of playback, a Chestnut-crowned Bush Warbler responded with its characteristic long, aggressive clicking

call (Clement et al. 2024), from a bush very close to us. After about thirty seconds of continuously calling, it gave the warbling “chew-chewey-you” song (Clement et al. 2024) shown in Fig. 1, for a few seconds and then went silent for two minutes. Finally, four minutes after we first heard it, the bird became visible when it came out to an open perch and started to sing its primary song (Clement et al. 2024), shown in Fig 2. We observed the bird through our binoculars, and it looked superficially like the Grey-sided Bush Warbler *C. brunifrons* but larger and robust with less grey on the breast and flanks [220]. It was also more shy than the Grey-sided Bush Warbler. In Assam, Chestnut-crowned Bush Warblers have been reported mainly from the Dibrugarh and Tinsukia Districts, with few reports from Manas and Kaziranga National Parks (eBird 2024d). This is the first photographic record from Majuli.

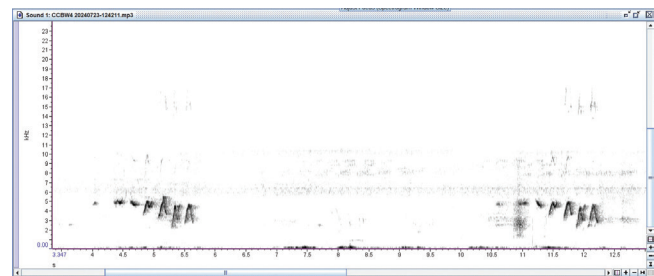


Fig. 1: Spectrogram of the “chew-chewey-you” song of the Chestnut-crowned Bush Warbler recorded on 10 December 2023

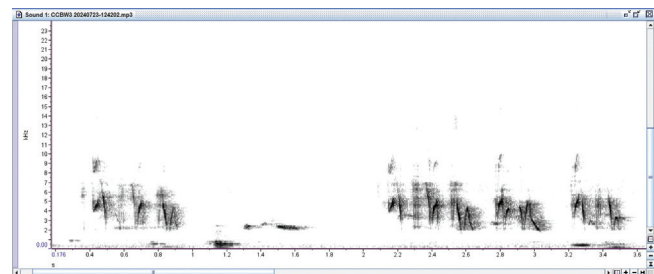


Fig. 2: Spectrogram of the primary song of the Chestnut-crowned Bush Warbler recorded on 10 December 2023



220. Chestnut-crowned Bush Warbler, Majuli.

### Brownish-flanked Bush Warbler *Horornis fortipes*

On 23 December 2023 at 1100 h, while observing a Slaty-bellied Tesia *Tesia olivea* in a woodland near Jugunidhari (26.925°N, 94.126°E), we heard an unfamiliar sound from the undergrowth but could not obtain a good recording. After some time, we briefly

saw the bird but could not identify it. On a return visit on 07 January 2024 at 1200 h, we heard the same sound, successfully recorded it (Fig. 3), and identified the bird as a Brownish-flanked Bush Warbler *Horornis fortipes* after playback. We photographed the bird on 08 January 2024 [221]. Although few recent records exist from Assam, this species is a common resident in the hills of north-eastern India (Rahmani et al. 2022; eBird 2024e) and is likely a regular winter migrant in the plains, often overlooked due to its subtle calls and plumage. Choudhury (2012) mentions it from Majuli without specific details or photos. This is the first photographic record from Majuli.

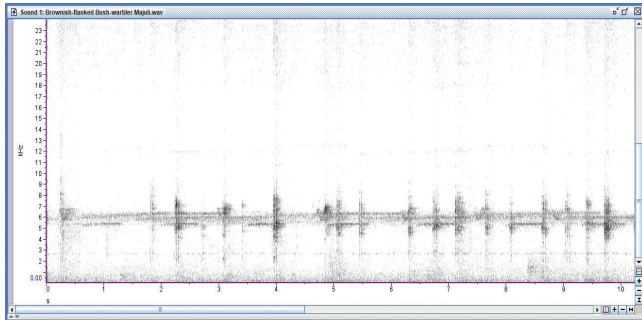


Fig 3. Spectrogram of the call of Brownish-flanked Bush Warbler recorded on 07 January 2023



All: Shyamal Saikia

221. Brownish-flanked Bush Warbler, Majuli.

### Rusty-bellied Shortwing *Brachypteryx hyperythra*

Rusty-bellied Shortwing *Brachypteryx hyperythra* is presently categorized under IUCN 'Near Threatened' category (Collar 2020; BirdLife International 2023d; eBird 2024f). It occurs in small disjunct populations from southern Sikkim to southern China (Collar 2020). Most of the recent records of the species in Assam are from the Dibrugarh and Tinsukia districts (eBird 2024b), but there are historical as well as one recent record from Lakhimpur district (Stevens 1914, 1915a,b; Boruah & Borah 2024; eBird

2024f). There are also records from Kaziranga National Park (Rahmani et al. 2022), Hoollongapar Gibbon Sanctuary (Firoz Hussain pers. comm. November 2023), and Dhemaji (eBird 2024b). The Rusty-bellied Shortwing is found at an elevation of 1800–3000 m asl during its breeding season, and it winters at an elevation of 450–2950 m asl (Collar 2020). We report four records of this species from Majuli in Table 1. Based on the presence of several individuals across one month, it is likely that Rusty-bellied Shortwing is a regular winter migrant to the island.



222. Female Rusty-bellied Shortwing, Majuli.



223. Male Rusty-bellied Shortwing, Majuli.

### Himalayan Bush Robin *Tarsiger rufilatus*

On 11 November 2023, at around 1600 h, we were birdwatching in a woodland with dense undergrowth near the Jugunidhari area (26.925°N, 94.126°E) of Majuli. We were observing a Pygmy Wren-Babbler *Pnoepyga pusilla* when a blue-coloured bird came onto a clear patch of the forest floor about five meters away from where we stood. We quickly observed the bird with our binoculars and noticed it had blue upperparts, white underparts, and orange flanks. It foraged in that clear patch for c.10 seconds and then

**Table 1.** Rusty-bellied Shortwing records from Majuli

Date & Time	Location	Coordinates	Sex	Habitat
28 November 2023 0800 h	Meragarh	26.963°N, 94.297°E	Female [222]	Scrub consisting of ferns, <i>Calamus tenuis</i> , <i>Schumannianthus dichotomus</i> , and <i>Phragmites karka</i> near forest with large trees and bamboo, c.100 m from human habitation.
04 December 2023 1430 h	Kamalabari	26.946°N, 94.161°E	Male [223]	Dense undergrowth of <i>Calamus tenuis</i> (a type of palm) and <i>Schumannianthus dichotomus</i> near a woodland pond, c.10 m from human habitation.
28 December 2023 1300 h	Gayan Gaon	26.979°N, 94.305°E	Male (seen)	Small dense scrubby patch of tall grass (mostly <i>Phragmites karka</i> ), close to woodland, c.100 m from human habitation and beside a busy road.
28 December 2023 1300 h	Gayan Gaon	26.979°N, 94.305°E	Unknown (heard)	Woodland with dense undergrowth of <i>Calamus tenuis</i> and <i>Schumannianthus dichotomus</i> .

flew towards the forest's edge. We relocated the bird foraging in the leaf litter and photographed it [224]. We identified the bird as a Himalayan Bush Robin *Tarsiger rufilatus* using Grimmett et al. (2016). We searched for the bird the next morning but could not find it. This is a highly uncommon bird in the plains of Assam, and it has been previously reported within Assam in winter from Manas National Park, Kaziranga National Park, Dihing-Patkai National Park, and Dum Duma Reserve Forest, but none from Majuli (Rahmani et al. 2022; eBird 2024g).



Shyamal Saikia

224. Himalayan Bush Robin foraging in the leaf litter.

These observations shed new light on the above species' distribution, migration routes, and wintering habits. Additionally, they highlight the need to conserve often overlooked habitats such as grasslands, bushes, and thickets, which many birds rely on. These areas are increasingly threatened by development, deforestation, and the conversion of wetlands into ponds or agricultural land. Urgent conservation efforts are needed to protect the island's ecosystems and valuable bird species.

We want to thank Rofikul Islam, Manash Pratim, Firoz Hussain, Sapon Baruah, Pallav Pranjal Sharma, Jyotirmoy Baishya, and Kallol Hazarika for providing us with valuable information about the Rusty-bellied Shortwing. We would also like to thank Sumit Das, Mayur Suman, and Geetashri Borah for helping us identify the plants. We thank Leons Mathew Abraham, Ashwin Viswanathan, and Masih Ahmed Khan Nayar for helping us identify the Mongolian Short-toed Lark. We also thank Ankur Hazarika, Rejaul Karim, Prasanna Kalita, Sapon Baruah, and Jugal Borah for accompanying us during the surveys.

## References

- Assam State Biodiversity Board, 2019. Biodiversity Heritage Sites. Website URL: <https://asbb.assam.gov.in/information-services/biodiversity-heritage-sites-bhs> [Accessed on 10 December 2023].
- BirdLife International, 2024a. Important Bird Area factsheet: Majuli. Website URL: <http://datazone.birdlife.org/site/factsheet/majuli-iba-india> [Accessed on 31 October 2024].
- BirdLife International, 2024b. Species factsheet: *Pluvialis squatarola*. Website URL: <https://datazone.birdlife.org/species/factsheet/grey-plover-pluvialis-squatarola> [Accessed on 31 October 2024].
- BirdLife International, 2024c. Species factsheet: *Schoenicola striatus*. Website URL: <https://datazone.birdlife.org/species/factsheet/bristled-grassbird-schoenicola-striatus> [Accessed on 29 May 2024].
- BirdLife International 2024d. Species factsheet: *Brachypteryx hyperythra*. Website URL: <http://datazone.birdlife.org/species/factsheet/rusty-bellied-shortwing-brachypteryx-hyperythra> [Accessed on 18 December 2023].
- Boruah, J. & Borah, J., 2024. Distribution of Rusty-bellied Shortwing in Assam with a recent record from Lakhimpur District. Bird-o-soar #232, In: *Zoo's Print* 39(4): 39–41.
- Choudhury, A., 1991. Bird observations from Sibsagar District, Assam, India. *Forktail* 6: 35–42.
- Choudhury, A., 2000. *The Birds of Assam*. Gibbon Books and WWF-India North-East Regional Office, Guwahati.
- Choudhury, A., 2012. Bird Life in Majuli Island. Pp. 49–62. In: Tamuly, D. N. (ed.), *The Blessed Island*. Programme Production Centre (NE), Doordarshan, Guwahati, India.
- Clement, P., 2020. Brownish-flanked Bush Warbler (*Horornis fortipes*), version 1.0. In *Birds of the World* (J. del Hoyo, A. Elliott, J. Sargatal, D. A. Christie, and E. de Juana, Editors). Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY, USA. <https://doi.org/10.2173/bow.bfbwar1.01>
- Clement, P., Kirwan G. M., & Sharma P., 2024. Chestnut-crowned Bush Warbler (*Cettia major*), version 1.1. In *Birds of the World* (J. del Hoyo, A. Elliott, J. Sargatal, D. A. Christie, and E. de Juana, Editors). Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY, USA. <https://doi.org/10.2173/bow.ccbwar1.01.1>
- Collar, N., (2020). Rusty-bellied Shortwing (*Brachypteryx hyperythra*), version 1.0. In *Birds of the World* (J. del Hoyo, A. Elliott, J. Sargatal, D. A. Christie, and E. de Juana, Editors). Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY, USA. <https://doi.org/10.2173/bow.rubsho1.01>
- Das, S., Pangging, D., & Lahkar, D., 2013. Birds of the Majuli-The biggest river Island of the world. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers* 53: 4.
- del Hoyo, J., Collar, N., & Christie, D. A., 2023. Himalayan Bluetail (*Tarsiger rufilatus*), version 1.1. In *Birds of the World* (S. M. Billerman, Editor). Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY, USA. <https://doi.org/10.2173/bow.himblu1.01.1>
- eBird, 2024a. Black-bellied Plover. Website URL: <https://ebird.org/species/bkbplo/IN-AS> [Accessed on 31 October 2024].
- eBird, 2024b. Mongolian Short-toed Lark. Website URL: <https://ebird.org/species/sstlar4/IN-AS> [Accessed on 20 September 2024].
- eBird, 2024c. Bristled Grassbird. Website URL: <https://ebird.org/species/brigra2/IN-AS> [Accessed on 20 September 2024].
- eBird, 2024d. Chestnut-crowned Bush Warbler. Website URL: <https://ebird.org/species/cbbwar1/IN-AS> [Accessed on 21 September 2024].
- eBird, 2024e. Brownish-flanked Bush Warbler. Website URL: <https://ebird.org/species/bfbwar1/IN-AS> [Accessed on 20 September 2024].
- eBird, 2024f. Rusty-bellied Shortwing. Website URL: <https://ebird.org/species/rubsho1/IN-AS> [Accessed on 19 September 2024].
- eBird, 2024g. Himalayan Bluetail. Website URL: <https://ebird.org/species/himblu1/IN-AS> [Accessed on 19 September 2024].
- Grimmett, R., Inskipp, C., & Inskipp, T., 2011. *Birds of the Indian Subcontinent*. 2nd ed. London: Oxford University Press & Christopher Helm. Pp. 1–528.
- Islam, Z. U., & Rahmani, A. R., 2004. *Important Bird Areas in India. Priority sites for conservation*. 1st ed. Mumbai: Indian Bird Conservation Network: Bombay Natural History Society and BirdLife International (UK). Pp. i-xviii, 1-1133.
- Joshi, R., Chaudhry, S., Palni, L. M. S., & Mathur, V. C., 2014. Avifaunal diversity, distribution and threats in Dibru-Saikhowa Biosphere Reserve North-East India Assam (India): A review. *Archives of Applied Science Research*, 6(5), 113-124.
- Krishnan, A., 2021. Bristled Grassbird (*Schoenicola striatus*), version 2.1. In *Birds of the World* (S. M. Billerman, M. A. Bridwell, and P. G. Rodewald, Editors). Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY, USA. <https://doi.org/10.2173/bow.brigra2.02.1>
- Poole, A. F., Pyle, P., Patten, M. A., & D. R. Paulson, 2020. Black-bellied Plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*), version 1.0. In *Birds of the World* (S. M. Billerman, Editor). Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY, USA. <https://doi.org/10.2173/bow.bkbplo.01>
- Rahmani, A., Kasambe, R., Choudhury, A., Rahman, A., Jha, A., Ali, R., & Surve, S., 2023. Annotated checklist of the birds of Kaziranga National Park and surrounding areas, Assam, with taxonomic changes briefly explained. *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society*. 120. [10.17087/jbnhs/2023/v120/166378](https://doi.org/10.17087/jbnhs/2023/v120/166378).
- Stevens, H., 1914. Notes on the birds of Upper Assam. Part I. *J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc.* 23 (2): 234–268.
- Stevens, H., 1915a. Notes on the birds of Upper Assam. Part II. *J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc.* 23 (3): 547–570.
- Stevens, H., 1915b. Notes on the birds of Upper Assam. Part II. *J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc.* 23 (4): 721–736.
- Talukdar, B. K., 1996. Waders of Dibru-Saikhowa Wildlife Sanctuary, Assam. *Wader Study Group Bulletin* 80: 80–81.
- Wiersma, P., Kirwan, G. M., & Boesman, P. F. D., 2020. Long-billed Plover (*Charadrius placidus*), version 1.0. In *Birds of the World* (J. del Hoyo, A. Elliott, J. Sargatal, D. A. Christie, and E. de Juana, Editors). Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY, USA. <https://doi.org/10.2173/bow.lbbplo1.01>

– Shyamal Saikia & Parthankar Choudhury

Shyamal Saikia, Department of Ecology and Environmental Science, Assam University, Silchar, 788011, Assam, INDIA.

Parthankar Choudhury, Department of Ecology and Environmental Science, Assam University, Silchar, 788011, Assam, INDIA. E-mail: [parthankar@rediffmail.com](mailto:parthankar@rediffmail.com) [Corresponding author]