

it is not fully understood whether the occurrence of the species is seasonal as a result of seasonal dispersal or whether the species is resident in the region.

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The Greater Scaup *Aythya marila* from Siswan, Punjab, India

The Greater Scaup *Aythya marila* is a rare and irregular non-breeding visitor to the Indian Subcontinent (Ali & Ripley 1978; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012), with scattered records from all over the country, except for southern India (eBird 2024). On 05 February 2023, during a visit to Siswan Lake (30.870°N, 76.757°E) in Sahibzada Ajit Singh Nagar, Punjab, for birdwatching, PB saw a duck that looked like a Tufted Duck *A. fuligula*, from a distance. It was in a loose flock of about 18 waterfowl (six Tufted Ducks, four Common Pochards *Aythya ferina*, and eight Indian Spot-billed Ducks *Anas poecilorhyncha*) and was diving frequently. Upon examining the photographs, it seemed different from the Tufted Duck due to the greenish gloss on the head, greyish back, and total lack of crest. A discussion with other birders (Neeraj V. & Rajive Das) confirmed its identity as a male Greater Scaup. Since the photos were not very good, another visit was made to the location on the same day. This time, the photographs were better [215]. The identification as male Greater Scaup was based on the lack of a crest, grey upper parts contrasting with black rear end, and green gloss to blackish head (Grimmett et al. 2011). This individual remained at the location for at least a week, and other birders also visited after seeing the present sighting on social media. It was

mostly seen with the same waterfowl mentioned previously and kept to the relatively shallower eastern part of the lake.



Pushkar Bali

215. Greater Scaup male, Siswan Lake, Punjab.

To locate previous records from Punjab, India, we searched the online 'Bibliography of South Asian Ornithology' (Pittie 2024). The earliest relevant mention of Greater Scaup in Punjab, India, is by Dhindsa et al. (1991). However, they only mention, "Recorded at Harike Bird Sanctuary on a few occasions; a winter visitor to Punjab." We asked the lead author, M.S. Dhindsa, on what basis it was included in the list. He informed (in litt. email dated 20 July 2024), "For some years between 1983 and 1986, researchers from the Bombay Natural History Society had set up bird ringing camps at Harike during winters. We visited them a few times and did bird watching together. That was when this duck was spotted." Robson (1997) attributes a sight record of two Greater Scaup to Per Undeland, from 02 March 1997. Most mentions of this species in Punjab are from Harike (Perennou et al. 1990; Prakash et al. 1997; Kazmierczak et al. 1998; Alfred et al. 2001). Singh (1993) included it in a checklist of birds of Punjab, but no primary source is indicated. Away from Harike, an occurrence has been reported from Ropar, now Roopnagar (Kumar et al. 2006). However, the record is ambiguous as no details are provided. Thus, we consider only three previous records from Punjab, all from Harike, as reliable: Perennou et al. (1990), Dhindsa et al. (1991), and the one attributed to Per Undeland (Robson 1997).

Therefore, the current record is significant being that it is far away from Harike (c.170 km) and because it is supported by photographic evidence. It underscores the importance of conserving all existing habitats where winter visitors can find an abode. This sighting is also a reminder for birdwatchers that they should always look for the presence of uncommon birds that may get overlooked due to similarities with their more common congeners.

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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.