UK. Pp. 1–336.
Pmk, P. 2024. Website URL: https://www.facebook.com/share/p/4MArhV2WJTsnkpiM/?mibextid=oFDknk [Accessed on 29 August 2024].
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.
Yosef, R., & ISWG International Shrike Working Group, 2020. Lesser Gray Shrike (*Lanius minor*), 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.legshr2.01.
Warakagoda, D., Inskipp, C., Inskipp, T., & Grimmett, R., 2012. *Birds of Sri Lanka*. 1st ed. London: Christopher Helm. Pp. 1–224.

– Ashok Amarasena & Moditha Kodikara Arachchi
Ashok Amarasena, 392A, Lake road, Awerihena, Hokandara, Sri Lanka. Email: ashokamarasena@yahoo.com [AA]
Moditha Kodikara Arachchi, Bird Identification and Research Deck (BIRD), No.3, Third Lane, Attidiya, Dehiwala, Sri Lanka. Email: meetmoditha@gmail.com [MK] [Corresponding author]

Status of the Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis* in Arunachal Pradesh

On 26 April 2019, I was birding with a group on the Mandala-Dirang Road in West Kameng, Arunachal Pradesh. It was a cloudy morning with light rain. At 0940 h, I was exploring a trail a little away from my group. The trail had *Rhododendron sp.* forest on one side and a grassy pasture on the other. The grassy area had stray cattle grazing and a few Russet Sparrows *Passer cinnamomeus* drinking from a puddle. I accidentally startled a drab brown bird that was with the Russet Sparrows. It scurried away initially but settled near the cattle, after which it did not seem perturbed by my close presence. The sparse vegetation allowed me to obtain great views and photographs **[190–191]**.

The observed bird looked very similar to an Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni,* which is common in this region, but on examining the details of the plumage it was identified as a Tree Pipit *A. trivialis*. The Olive-backed Pipit is closely related to the Tree Pipit, and it has a strong buffy-white supercilium, olive back, a lightly streaked mantle, and a strongly marked face, including ear coverts with a single black spot below a single white spot (Grimmett et al. 2016). On the other hand, this bird had a weakly marked face (including a weak supercilium), brown as opposed to olive tones on the back, more prominent streaks on the mantle, and only a white spot on its ear coverts. We could not use its call as an identification pointer as the bird did not vocalize, but its plumage was enough to confirm the identification. The media and observation were uploaded to eBird (Vyas 2019). This sighting was not given much attention for almost five years, until as recently as 09 April 2024, when it was further discussed with Dhyey Shah, Ashwin Viswanathan, and Kousheyo Bagchi, who also agreed that the bird is a Tree Pipit.

Vyom Vyas

190. Tree Pipit from Mandala Road.

Vyom Vyas

191. Tree Pipit from Mandala Road.

Tyler (2020) recognizes two subspecies of the Tree Pipit. The nominate race breeds extensively across temperate Asia and migrates to sub-Saharan Africa and India for the northern winter. Additionally, the *haringtoni* race, breeds in the northwest Himalayas, including Kashmir, and winters in India. Although specimens of the two subspecies show minor differences, they are not considered distinguishable in the field or from photographs. (Alström & Mild 2003).

The first public report of Tree Pipit from north-eastern India is in Srinivasan et al. (2010). Their published record is sourced from unpublished sightings made between 1997–2007 in Namdapha National Park by Aparajita Dutta. Whether it was one or multiple sightings is unknown because specific dates are not mentioned. Identifying characteristics, precise location, and elevation are not mentioned either. The second public record is from 15 April 2019 on an unnamed road near Mandala, in the West Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh (Ramachandran 2019). The bird was identified in the field by its relatively unmarked face and lack of olive on the back. The '*yunnanensis*' subspecies of Olive-backed Pipit was eliminated by the lack of white and black spots on the ear coverts. No media was submitted. The sighting reported in this note occurred just 11 days after the above sighting, and the locations are merely 12 km apart. We found two additional public records from north-eastern India, both from the Assam plains. An individual was reported in an eBird checklist from the Central Range of Kaziranga National Park on 18 December 2004 (Steiner 2004). The record was substantiated by a description of field marks, "Brownish back (no olive tones) with bold dark markings, unmarked rump, tertials with pale fringes, finer flank streaks compared to breast streaks, face markings less contrasty." A second observation is claimed from a bird diversity survey of Dibru-Saikhowa National Park (Joshi et al. 2014). No date and identification details were provided, so we consider this record doubtful. Sharma et al. (2014) reported Tree Pipits from Lohit valley. However, the accompanying photo does not show any characteristics of a Tree Pipit like the shorter tail and well-streaked flanks. Hence, the same is treated here as doubtful.

I express my sincere gratitude to Ashwin Viswanathan for curating the idea for this manuscript and providing guidance throughout the process. The literature survey to find published records was performed using Pittie (2024).

References

Alström, P., & Mild, K., 2010. *Pipits and Wagtails of Europe, Asia, and North America*. A&C Black. Pp. 132–140.
Grimmett, R., Inskipp, C., & Inskipp, T., 2011. *Birds of the Indian Subcontinent.* 2nd ed.

London: Oxford University Press & Christopher Helm. Pp. 1–528.
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* 6:113–124.
Pittie, A., 2024. Bibliography of South Asian Ornithology. Website URL: http://www.southasiaornith.in [Accessed on 20 April 2024].
Ramachandran, V., 2019. Website URL: https://ebird.org/checklist/S55426483 [Accessed on 19 April 2024].
Sharma, M., Sangha, H. S., & Jain, A. 2014. Some noteworthy records from the Lohit Valley, eastern Arunachal Pradesh, India. *Indian BIRDS* 9 (4): 88–92.
Srinivasan, U., Dalvi, S., Naniwadekar, R., Osuri, A., & Datta, A., 2010. The birds of Namdapha National Park and surrounding areas: Recent significant records and a checklist of the species. *Forktail* 26: 92–116.
Steiner, A., 2004. Website URL: https://ebird.org/checklist/S99538893 [Accessed on 19 April 2024].
Tyler, S., 2020. Tree Pipit (*Anthus trivialis*), 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.trepip.01
Vyas, V., 2019. Website URL: https://ebird.org/checklist/S55443953 [Accessed on 19 April 2024].

– Vyom Vyas
Vyom Vyas, 8-Jayantilal Park, Ambli-Bopal Road, Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India.
Email: vyomvyas2004@gmail.com

Aerial hunting and feeding by Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis* on Asian Palm Swift *Cypsiurus balasiensis* and House Swift *Apus nipalensis*

The Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis* (hereinafter, STEA) is a winter migrant throughout the Indian subcontinent. Most STEAs migrating to the sub-continent tend to be juveniles or sub-adults (Naoroji 2006). They prey on reptiles, mammals, and birds though most of the time during the winter they are observed scavenging (Naoroji 2006). This raptor is commonly sighted around Rani, Kamrup district of Assam, India during winter (November to April). On 04 January 2023, we observed a sub-adult STEA hunting Asian Palm Swifts *Cypsiurus balasiensis*. At 1056 h, four STEAs were soaring in the sky where 5–6 Asian Palm Swifts were also present. One of the STEAs gained height above the swifts and then dove to catch one swift on the first attempt itself. Seeing the successful hunt, rest of the sub-adult STEAs started chasing the first eagle. During the piracy attack, the eagle lost its kill in the air, but retrieved it in mid-air and ate it immediately.

In the next winter, on 14 December 2023, 1054 h, we observed a successful hunt by a STEA on an Asian Palm Swift followed by another successful hunt on a House Swift *Apus nipalensis*. In this case also, the hunter consumed both prey mid-air, dodging a conspecific and two Black-eared Kites *Milvus migrans*. STEAs are known for hunting across the steppe landscape. In this case we observed hunting and feeding high in the air (seemingly *c.*250 m). We could find only one reported incident of STEA hunting in mid-air at Eilat, Israel during raptor migration, in which the prey was a Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo* (Weiss & Yosef 2010). In our sightings, the prey items are comparatively small, agile, and probably novel prey item for STEAs.

References

Naoroji, R. 2006. *Birds of Prey of the Indian Subcontinent.* Om Books International, Delhi. Pp. 1–692.
Weiss, N. & Yosef, R. 2010. Steppe Eagle (*Aquila nipalensis*) hunts a Eurasian Buzzard (*Buteo buteo vulpinus*) while in migration over Eilat, Israel. *Journal of Raptor Research* 44(1): 77–78 https://doi.org/10.3356/JRR-09-57.1

– Jay Gore & Sachin Ranade
Both authors: Bombay Natural History Society, Vulture Conservation Breeding Centre-Rani, Assam, INDIA -781131. Email: j.gore@bnhs.org [Corresponding Author]

The Chinese Pond-Heron *Ardeola bacchus* in Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh, India

On 14 May 2024, at 1910 h, RB briefly saw a pond-heron *Ardeola* sp. *c.* 100 m away, flying from the Khoh riverbed and perch in a mango tree near his house, at Kashirampur Talla, Kotdwar, Pauri Garhwal District, Uttarakhand (29.739°N, 78.521°E; 388 m asl). In the fading light, the bird appeared similar to an Indian Pond-Heron *A. grayii* in breeding plumage, but considerably darker, almost black on the back and with a hint of purple colouration to its head. RB suspected the bird to be a Chinese Pond-Heron *A. bacchus.* On 16 May 2024, at 1030 h, while birding at another location along the Khoh River at Saneh park, near Saneh Forest Resthouse (29.690°N, 78.522°E; 331 m asl), RB came across a Chinese Pond-Heron, possibly the same individual he had seen two days ago, *c.*5 km north of this site **[192]**. Due to some disturbance caused by a group of people who were walking across the riverbed here, the bird took flight and flew across to the opposite side of the riverbank. As the border between the states of Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand runs along the Khoh River at this location, the bird had actually flown across and into the state of Uttar Pradesh. On 17 May 2024, at 0810 h, a Chinese Pond Heron, also in breeding plumage, was seen and photographed at the same location in the Khoh riverbed by RB, MS and PK, both within the boundaries of Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh states. The bird was again photographed in flight crossing the river, and thus, the border between the states by PK **[193]**.

The Chinese Pond-Heron breeds from Russian Far East, north-eastern and eastern China, and Japan south-west to Assam in north-eastern India and northern Myanmar; and it spends its non-breeding period in Andaman Islands, Malay Peninsula, Indochina, Borneo and Sumatra, and north-east to Ryukyu Islands in Japan (Martínez-Vilalta et al. 2020). In India, the species primarily occurs in north-eastern India and the Andaman Islands (Grimmett et al. 2011). Apart from its regular distribution range in the country, there are several scattered records of the species from West Bengal (Gupta 2017; eBird 2024), Tamil Nadu (Kaninde 2013), Kerala (Jacob 2021), Maharashtra (Taware et al. 2012), Gujarat (Parasharya 1983, 2004), Rajasthan (Poonia et al. 2013), and Odisha (Khopkar 2017). In South Asia, the species has been reported from Bhutan (Viswanathan 2016; eBird 2024), Bangladesh (Roddis & Loseby 2018), Nepal (eBird 2024), Sri Lanka (Roddis & Loseby 2020, 2021), and Pakistan (Khan et al. 2015). There are no known records of the species from the states of Uttarakhand (Mohan & Sondhi 2017; eBird 2024) and Uttar Pradesh (eBird 2024). The present sightings appear to be the first records of the species documented from the states of Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh.

192. Chinese Pond-Heron in the Khoh riverbed. Photo credits: Rajeev Bisht