

S. S. Suresh



19. Stork-billed Kingfisher feeding on *Caryota urens* fruit.

The fruits of the fishtail palm are small, red, containing a single seed, and the fruits hang down from the top of the tree in a cluster. The fruits contain sharp crystals that can cause irritation and chemical burns; *urens* mean burning. The fruit has a human skin-irritating nature due to the presence of oxalic acid, and it also contains anti-nutritional substances such as phytate, tannin and saponin. It is reported that these seeds are rich in starch and basic sugars, including glucose, fructose, and sucrose (Perumpuli et al. 2022).

A number of frugivorous avian species that have been documented to feed on palm fruits. For example, Green Imperial Pigeon *Ducula aenea* (Santharam 1996), Malabar Pied Hornbill *Anthracoceros coronatus* (Iyer 2023), and Narcondom Hornbill *Rhyticeros narcondami* (Naniwadekar et al. 2022) in India, and Lineated Barbet *Psilopogon lineata* and 20 other species in Malaysia (Wee 2010; 2017). More than half of the diet of Palm-nut Vulture *Gypohierax angolensis* are palm fruits (Kemp & Kirwan 2020). Though there are a variety of birds species that feed on palm fruits, there are no published reports of Stork-billed Kingfishers, or in fact any Kingfisher *spp.*, feeding on *Caryota urens* or other palm fruits. It will be interesting to know whether this behaviour is seen in other parts of this species' extensive range.

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– S. S. Suresh

11 F, Capital green, SKVC road, Trichur 680011. Kerala, India. E-mail: [dr.s.s.suresh@gmail.com](mailto:dr.s.s.suresh@gmail.com)

## The Ashy Bulbul *Hemixos flavala* in Sirmaur, Himachal Pradesh, India

The Ashy Bulbul *Hemixos flavala* is a distinctive, crested bulbul that is a common resident of broadleaved forests, adjacent plantation and forest edges in the Himalayan foothills from 300–1,600 m asl (Grimmett et al. 1998; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012).

On 28 March 2016, AV was hiking down a dense broadleaved forest that eventually descended into a stream on the eastern slope of the Nahan Ridge (30.563°N, 77.319°E; c.750 m asl) in Sirmaur District, Himachal Pradesh. This stream was flanked by thickly forested mountain slopes on both sides. The dense forest understory was dotted with many natural springs that form large pools of water. Around 1230 h, some unfamiliar bird calls were heard while walking along the river bank. The source of the sound was traced to two bulbuls that were perched high in the tree canopy. The birds had a black bill and black face mask that strongly contrasted against the white throat. The underparts looked pale. These features helped identify the species as Ashy Bulbul.

On 21 December 2022, at 0900 h, IAK sighted a single Ashy Bulbul near Nahan, Sirmaur District, Himachal Pradesh. This observation unfolded in the course of a journey from Dehradun to Chandigarh, during a brief tea break at a road check-post near Nahan (30.550°N, 77.284°E; c.932 m asl). At this time, the resonating call of a Blue Whistling-Thrush *Myophonus caeruleus* perched on a nearby tree beside a small water stream was heard. Intrigued by the melodious call, attention was drawn towards a tree where the Ashy Bulbul was eventually spotted and photographed [20]. It showed prominent olive-yellow wing-patch, a black head and white throat, and was unmistakable. Later on, IAK and CA discussed the significance of the record and decided to document it.



20. Ashy Bulbul near Nahan, Sirmaur District on 21 December 2022.

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Grimmett et al. (1998) mentioned the range of the species from Uttarakhand east to Arunachal Pradesh, and north-eastern India. Ali & Ripley (1987) mentioned that its range starts from the region between Shimla and Mussoorie, while Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) mentioned that it is local in Himachal Pradesh. Grimmett et al. (2011) depicted a single record from southern half of Himachal Pradesh in the illustrated map of the species. Koelz (1936a, b) collected two specimens during breeding season from Kukti [=Kugti], Chamba District on 05 July 1936

which are catalogued at the Field Museum of Natural History (FMNH), Chicago, USA (FMNH 237025 and FMNH 237026) and were labelled as Ashy Bulbul [21]. These records seemed quite unusual as the average elevation of Kugti village is 2,600 m asl, and the species is usually found below 1,600 m asl, and maximum up to 2,200 m asl. Kugti is located in north-western Himachal Pradesh, and is c.250 km from the Uttarakhand border with Himachal Pradesh, which is approximately the presently known western-most breeding range of the species. The FMNH was contacted for more information on the specimens, and it was found that the specimens were of nestlings which made verifying the species by physical features difficult (Mary Hennen, in litt., e-mail dated 16 September 2024). Later, a specimen of adult male Black Bulbul *Hypsipetes leucocephalus* (FMNH 236978) was located in the collection of FMNH, which was obtained from the same location, i.e., Kugti, and date, i.e., 05 July 1936, by the same collector, with a notation that stated, 'parent of two nestlings' (John Bates, in litt., e-mail dated 17 September 2024; Koelz 1936c). John Bates further commented that the probable misidentification of the nestlings might have been the result of the specimens getting separated from the adult specimen during cataloguing decades ago, and that this error has been fixed in the database and the collection.



21. Two specimens of nestlings (FMNH 237025 and FMNH 237026) catalogued at FMNH, Chicago, USA.

It is not clear whether Koelz's nestling specimens (FMNH 237025 and FMNH 237026) were the basis of inclusion of Himachal Pradesh in the distribution of the species by Rasmussen & Anderton (2012). This record appears to be different from the record mentioned in Ali & Ripley (1987) and Grimmett et al. (2011), as the latter two records originate from southern Himachal Pradesh, whereas Kugti is located in the north-western part of the State. We could not find any published record or specimen from southern Himachal Pradesh (Pittie 2024; GBIF 2024; VertNet 2024). No specimen could be found from Himachal Pradesh at the Natural History Museum, London, UK (Mark Adams, in litt., e-mail dated 29 April 2024). We could not find any other records in eBird, Facebook groups, or other social media. The species is not listed in Dhadwal (2019). The two Nahan records documented in this note confirm the presence of Ashy Bulbul in Himachal Pradesh and the record by IAK appears to be the first photographic record from the state.

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the respective details and photographs; and Mark Adams for confirming that there is no specimen of Ashy Bulbul from the state in NHM.

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– Iqbal Ali Khan, Ankit Vikrant & C. Abhinav

Iqbal Ali Khan, Ph.D. Scholar, Zoological Survey of India, Dehradun 248195, Uttarakhand, India. E-mail: [khanbt555@gmail.com](mailto:khanbt555@gmail.com) [IAK]

Ankit Vikrant, Department of Space, Earth and Environment, Chalmers University of Technology, Maskingränd 2, 412 58 Gothenburg, Sweden.

E-mail: [ankitvikrant74@gmail.com](mailto:ankitvikrant74@gmail.com) [AV]

C. Abhinav, Village & P.O. Ghurkari, Kangra 176001, Himachal Pradesh, India.

E-mail: [drabhinav.c@gmail.com](mailto:drabhinav.c@gmail.com) [CA] [Corresponding Author]

## House Sparrows *Passer domesticus* occupying Streak-throated Swallow *Petrochelidon fluvicola* nests

Many birds are known to compete for nesting sites with other species, or reuse old nests of other species (Raju 1981; Jha 2001). In North America, House Sparrows *Passer domesticus* have been documented re-using old nests of swallows such as Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*, Cliff Swallow *Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*, Bank Swallow *Riparia riparia*, Eastern Phoebe *Sayornis phoebe*, and American Robin *Turdus migratorius* (Campbell et al. 2007) or even usurp active nests (Leasure et al. 2010). However, such behavior has not been reported widely from the Indian subcontinent. Here we report House Sparrows occupying nests in an active Streak-throated Swallow *Petrochelidon fluvicola* colony. On 14 March 2024, we observed five pairs of House Sparrows breeding in old Streak-throated Swallows nests under the Rapt Bridge (22.603°N, 80.361°E) on Narmada River in Mandla Madhya Pradesh, India [22]. We observed male House Sparrows visiting the colony and ejecting nesting materials from Streak-throated Swallow nests. However, whether those nests were active or inactive could not be determined.

The sparrows not only took over the nests, but also usurped nesting materials like feathers, which the swallows had collected to line their nests. The sparrows then broadened the entrance to the nesting cavities. Out of 196 swallow nests, five were occupied by House Sparrows. Out of these five nests, two contained eggs, but none of these attempts were successful in producing young. This observation highlights the adaptive nature of House Sparrows who may be benefiting not only from the nests themselves but also the precarious nest location of the