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The Blyth's Swift *Apus leuconyx* from Jammu & Kashmir, India

On 17 March 2024, at about 0830 h, while birdwatching near Temple Kanjli between Malhar and Dhaggar (32.728°N, 75.685°E; 2,527 m asl) in Kathua district, Jammu & Kashmir, India, HK observed about thirty *Apodidae* swifts flying in the sky. A few photos were clicked. To ascertain the bird's identity, the photographs were posted on the *Ask IDs of Indian Birds* Facebook group. The bird was identified in the group as Blyth's Swift *Apus leuconyx* [38].



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38. Blyth's Swift, Kathua district, Jammu & Kashmir.

Ali & Ripley (1983) describe this bird "as a deeply fork-tailed swift, blackish brown above with a broad white rump-patch; squamated or mottled black and white below, with whitish chin and throat." The forked tail is not visible in the above photograph because of the angle of sight. The squamation (mottling) on the underparts is also not clearly visible as the photo was taken from afar. However, the white rump-patch and the whitish chin and throat are clearly visible. Little Swift *A. affinis* can look similar because it too has a white rump-patch, but that species has a square tail (though not possible to compare here) and an obvious rounded white throat-patch.

Blyth's Swift occurs in the breeding season along the outer Himalayas between c.600 and c.3,600 m asl from Murree Hills (Pakistan) and Kashmir eastwards to the north-east including Nepal, Sikkim, Assam Hills and Bhutan (Ali & Ripley 1983; Leader

et al. 2023). The breeding period is from February to August, both months included (Baker 1934).

Although Blyth's Swift has been included in the checklist of birds of Jammu & Kashmir, no photographic evidence or specimen exists (Kichloo et al. 2024). Its presence in the region, however, is supported by ornithological literature. Lawrence (1895) was the first to suggest that it is likely to occur in Kashmir, but the earliest recorded mention was by Ward (1907). Osmaston (1927) noted occasional sightings of the species in flight at higher elevations in the Great Himalayan Range. Bates & Lowther (1952) included it in the breeding birds of Kashmir. More recently, Price & Jamdar (1990), recorded the species in the Overa Wildlife Sanctuary in Anantnag district, while Awan et al. (2010, 2012) documented it from Muzaffarabad in Pakistan Administered Kashmir. Grimmett et al. (2011) and Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) included Jammu & Kashmir in this species' summer/breeding range on their distribution maps. Before the present record, the most recent observation was from Aru Valley (above Mondlan) in Anantnag district on 24 July 2022 (Eaton et al. 2022). The present sighting, therefore, is the first photographic record of Blyth's Swift in Jammu & Kashmir.

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