

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.

We thank Mary Hennen and John Bates from FMNH for checking the specimens from Himachal Pradesh and providing

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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## 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

swallows. Why the sparrows did not breed successfully in this location remains unknown but warrants a follow up study.



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22. A pair of House Sparrows in the Streak-throated Swallow colony.

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## The Black-headed Bunting *Emberiza melanocephala* in Chirang District, Assam

The Black-headed Bunting *Emberiza melanocephala* is a common non-breeding winter visitor in west and central India. It is commonly recorded during winter in Gujarat, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, northern Karnataka, and Madhya Pradesh while being a passage migrant in Pakistan as well as Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, and Jammu (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012; eBird 2024). Our recent observation of a Black-headed Bunting flock at Bengtol Road in Chirang District, Assam, India, over a two-month period marks a noteworthy record. While previous studies have reported the species in various areas of north-eastern India, prolonged observation for months at a single site has not occurred.

During a routine bird survey on 31 January 2024 along the Bongaigaon to Gelephu (Bhutan) highway, a small flock of passerine birds was observed in the Chirang district by AP at 0745 h near Bengtol Road (26.575°N, 90.518°E). It was a flock of ten birds where three individuals were male with characteristic yellow underparts, black heads, black cheeks, and contrasting throats [23]. The birds were present for almost two months (Table 1). During our first sighting and across February, the flock was observed foraging on the grains in the harvested paddy fields along with Paddyfield Pipit *Anthus rufulus*, while in March, they were noted perching on bushes and bamboo thickets.



Aniket Pawar

23. Black-headed Bunting at Bengtol Road.

**Table 1.** Observations of Black-headed Bunting at the Bengtol Road, Chirang District, Assam

Date	Observation	Remarks
31 January 2024	A small flock of 10 individuals with three males	First sighting
29 February 2024	A large flock of c.60 individuals	Individuals of different sizes seen
27 March 2024	Two flocks in the same area, total c.30–40 birds	Flocks were feeding & resting on bamboo thickets
15 April 2024	No sighting of the species	Potential migration back to breeding grounds

Sightings of Black-headed Bunting in north-eastern India are scarce, with only six records available in eBird and iNaturalist (Table 2). No other records were found on social media. In recent years this species has been sighted outside its regular range in South Asia many times, including Bangladesh (Chowdhury 2011), West Bengal (Adhurya et al. 2016), and Nepal (Baral & Neupane 2022). This species has been recorded as a vagrant as far away as Southeast Asia, Borneo, the east coast of China, and even Japan (eBird 2024).

**Table 2.** Records of Black-headed Bunting from north-eastern India

Date	District & State	Count	Reference
12 April 2008	West Kameng, Arunachal Pradesh	1	Colenutt (2008)
01 November 2017	Bishnupur, Manipur	1	Singh (2017)
20 October 2023	Sonitpur, Assam	2	Saikia (2023)
14 November 2023	Baksa, Assam	1	Modak (2023)
04 January 2024	Baksa, Assam	1	Das (2024)
16 January 2024	Kokrajhar, Assam	10	Chanda (2024)

This record from the Chirang District is the first documentation of the species residing in Assam for a long period – two months. The flock's extended presence in the area during February and March suggests it may have spent part of the winter there or used the site for prolonged stopover during migration. These eastern records challenge existing knowledge of the species' distribution and migration patterns, raising questions about potential alternate migratory routes, wintering grounds, and a broader range than previously understood. Future efforts, such as tagging and ringing of individuals at these newly documented sites, could provide valuable insights into their migratory behavior and breeding locations.