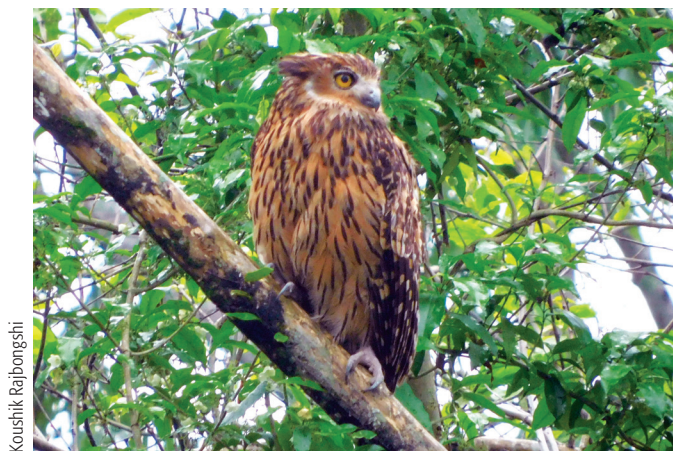


The Tawny Fish-Owl *Ketupa flavipes* from Manas National Park and its status in the Brahmaputra Valley

On 02 April 2024, during fieldwork near the Beki River at Mothanguri (26.768°N, 90.971°E; c.130 m asl) in Manas National Park, we photographed a large owl perched on a Lali tree *Walsura robusta* at 1100 h on a rainy day. We initially identified the bird as the Brown Fish-Owl *Ketupa zeylonensis*. After scrutinizing the picture further with the help of experts and field guides (Grimmett et al. 2011), we concluded that it was a Tawny Fish-Owl *K. flavipes* [33]. Unlike the Brown Fish-Owl, the bird had an unstreaked orange-rufous facial disc, which shows a streaked buffy facial disc. It had prominent ear tufts and greenish-grey cere and bill. Its tarsi were partially feathered, unlike the Brown Fish-Owl, which has bare tarsi. We observed the bird for nearly two minutes before it flew away. The habitat was moist deciduous forest featuring tree species such as *Walsura robusta*, *Terminalia bellirica*, *Sterculia villosa*, *Duabanga grandiflora*, and *Dysoxylum binectariferum*.



Koushik Rajbongshi

33. Tawny Fish-Owl near the Beki River in Manas National Park.

The Tawny Fish-Owl is distributed widely across the Himalayas, eastern Indochina, southern China, and Taiwan, and it is usually found in old-growth broadleaf forests near fast-flowing streams (Hong 2013; Holt et al. 2020). According to Rasmussen & Anderton (2012), in India, it is found in the Himalayan foothills from Himachal Pradesh to north-eastern India, including the Khasi Hills in Meghalaya, the Mizo Hills (also known as Lushai Hills) in Mizoram and Manipur. There are many records in eBird from the Himalayan foothills in Uttarakhand, Nepal, Bhutan, and Arunachal Pradesh (Chhophel 2023; eBird 2024). It has been recorded as high as 2,450 m asl from Arunachal Pradesh (Bhattacharya et al. 2021). In the Brahmaputra Valley, this species is primarily observed in the plains near the foothills, with regular sightings between 280–400 m asl along the banks of the Noa-Dihing River in Namdapha National Park (eBird 2024). Ritschard & Marques (2007) reported this species from the Bhalukpong plains, close to the Arunachal Pradesh and Assam border at c.100 m asl. Published records of the owl from the banks of the Brahmaputra River in the plains are scarce, with only two confirmed sightings in eBird (Siang Expedition 2022; Vishwanathan & Prashak 2022). Additionally, Baruah & Sharma (1999) mentions that the bird is a rare resident in the semi-evergreen forest, swampy forest, and riparian forest of Kaziranga National Park, whereas Choudhury (2006a) mentions that it is a rare resident in the Dibru-Saikhowa

National Park. Chowdhury (2006b) also mentions its presence in Manas National Park, but no photographic evidence is provided. Ours is the first record with photographs from Manas National Park and the foothill-adjacent plains of the Brahmaputra north bank in lower Assam.

We extend my heartfelt gratitude to the Assam Forest Department for permitting us to enter the park. We deeply appreciate the support provided by the forest guards, whose assistance was invaluable. Special thanks go to Ginu George, Ashwin Viswanathan, and Subramanian Venkataramani for their help in identifying the bird.

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- Koushik Rajbongshi, Leons Mathew Abraham, Jonmani Kalita, Karan Barman & Dhritiman Das
Koushik Rajbongshi, Aaranyak, 13 Tayab Ali Lane, Beltola, Guwahati, 781028, Assam, India.
E-mail: koushik@aaranyak.org [Corresponding author]
Leons Mathew Abraham, Pygmy Hog Research & Breeding Center, Indira Nagar, Basistha, Guwahati, 781029, Assam, India.
Jonmani Kalita, Aaranyak, 13 Tayab Ali Lane, Beltola, Guwahati, 781028, Assam, India.
Karan Barman, Fatasil Manpara, Guwahati, 781025, Assam, India.
Dhritiman Das, Pygmy Hog Conservation Programme-Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, Indira Nagar, Basistha, Guwahati 781029, Assam, India.

The Chestnut-headed Bee-eater *Merops leschenaulti* from Punjab, India

The Chestnut-headed Bee-eater *Merops leschenaulti* is found in open areas within wooded country up to 1,500 m asl in the Indian subcontinent (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). In this note, we report the first photographs of Chestnut-headed Bee-eater from Punjab, India, obtained in Haripur, Rupnagar District, and review its status in the state.

On 16 May 2021, KC visited his family's farm in the hills above Haripur village (30.944°N, 76.677°E; c.390 m asl), Rupnagar District, Punjab. KC saw four Chestnut-headed Bee-eaters and photographed one perched on a thin branch of a bush [34]. A few Asian Green Bee-eaters *M. orientalis* were also flying around, seemingly, in search of food. Chestnut-headed

Bee-eater was separated from Asian Green Bee-eater by the chestnut crown and nape, yellow throat, and absence of long tail-streamers. This individual flew off after a while, and KC didn't follow it. On another visit to the farm on 17 May 2023, KC came across five Chestnut-headed Bee-eaters. One was perched on an electric wire with an Asian Green Bee-eater [35] and could be easily differentiated from the latter.



34. Chestnut-headed Bee-eater, Haripur, Punjab.



Both: Karmannye Chaudhary

35. Chestnut-headed Bee-eater (left) and Asian Green Bee-eater, Haripur, Punjab.

On both occasions, 4–5 birds were seen, but no breeding behaviour like mating or presence outside nesting holes was noted. The bee-eaters were catching insects from a pond. They were seen feeding on water striders and dragonfly nymphs. The Bee-eaters were diving in the water to catch the nymphs. They would dive in and come out with each bird remaining submerged only for a fraction of a second. Sometimes, the tips of their wings and tails remained above the surface. This was observed using binoculars, and no photographs were obtained. The birds were present from April to June during the years that they were observed. This falls within their overall breeding season from February to June (Ali & Ripley 1983). Thus, we deduce that they could possibly be breeding here.

As per Rasmussen & Anderton (2012), the Chestnut-headed Bee-eater is mainly a summer visitor to the base and foothills of Himalaya from Uttarakhand to Arunachal Pradesh and the Brahmaputra valley of Assam, but in this range, a few are present in winters too. However, its presence in the Shivalik Hills region of northern Haryana, near Punjab, is documented (Kalsi et al. 2019; eBird 2024), c.35 km southeast of our

sighting location. Distributions maps in Grimmett et al. (2011) and Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) do not show their presence in Himachal Pradesh, but their presence and breeding are now known (Abhinav & Singh 2023). From Jammu & Kashmir, the only confirmed record of this species is a photograph from Roop Nagar, Jammu (Sharma 2019). However, there is an older record from the Rajouri District of Jammu & Kashmir (Shawl 1996), but no photo or field notes are available with the observer (Tahir Shawl in litt, WhatsApp message dated 04 August 2024).

For Punjab, a list of birds issued by PUNENVIS (2005) included Chestnut-headed Bee-eater in a column with the heading, 'Recorded in 2001-2002.' However, no other details were provided. Kumar et al. (2006) mention Chestnut-headed Bee-eater from Shahnehar & Talwara (Hoshiarpur District), Dhar & Dunera (Pathankot District), and Rupnagar. However, no supporting details are provided. The locations in the above two references are in the Shivalik foothills, where suitable summer habitat for the species is found. Kaur & Brraich (2021) reported the species from Nangal, Punjab (again a location in the Shivalik foothills), but without any details. Abhinav & Singh (2023) did not consider this record because the "list includes several erroneous records." No records were found in the specimen database of the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF). We found no photographs from Punjab on social media (Facebook, Instagram) and citizen science platforms (eBird, iNaturalist). Thus, the observations presented in this work are the only photographic records of the Chestnut-headed Bee-eater in Punjab and also underscore their presence during a period and in a habitat suitable for breeding.

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– Gurpartap Singh & Karmannye Chaudhary

Gurpartap Singh, 1969, Sector 64, Mohali, District Sahibzada Ajit Singh Nagar, 160062, Punjab, India. E-mail: prof.gurpartap.singh@gmail.com [GPS] [Corresponding author]
Karmannye Chaudhary, #A-12, Uppal Marble Arch, Manimajra, Chandigarh 160101, India.
E-mail: karmannyechaudhary@gmail.com [KC]