153. Long-billed Plover from Buhchangphai, Kolasib District, Mizoram

Both: Christopher Lawlor

154. Long-billed Plover from Buhchangphai, Kolasib District, Mizoram

We identified the bird as a Long-billed Plover *T. placidus* based on a combination of features noted during field observation and described in established literature (Kumar et al. 2005; Grimmett et al. 2011; Grewal et al. 2016; Wiersma et al. 2024). Unlike the Little Ringed Plover, which shows a striking black facial mask, a thin black forehead band, a bright yellow eye-ring, and a broad sharply defined breast band, the Long-billed Plover presents a softer facial pattern, with a thin eye-ring, a white supercilium that extends well past the eye, and a narrow breast band. The differences in structure are significant too: the Long-billed Plover has a noticeably longer and thicker bill, as well as a slightly larger, more elongated body with longer legs. In contrast, the Little Ringed Plover is smaller, more compact, and has a short, stubby bill. These combined characteristics left little doubt about the bird's identity.

Grimmett et al. (2011) mention that Long-billed Plovers breed in northern Asia and are rare but regular winter migrants to north and northeast India. They are recorded to be resident in north-eastern India as well, breeding in flowing rivers with shingle islands and banks (Grimmet et al. 2011; Majumdar et al. 2022). Eaton & Rheindt (2009) present the first breeding record in the Indian subcontinent, from Sangti Valley of western Arunachal Pradesh. Greeshma (2011) informs about their distribution, behaviour, and breeding in Rupa, Arunachal Pradesh, suggesting that they might be breeding in the area, while Grimmett et al. (2011) report that they breed in western Arunachal Pradesh.

A search into the existing bibliography of birds in Mizoram for Long-billed Plovers proved futile, except for a presumption by Choudhury (2008) as a species that could be found in Mizoram, based on reports of its presence in neighbouring states. It has not been mentioned in Zonunmawia & Pradhan (2004), Lalthanzara & Kasambe (2015), Lawlor & Lalthanzara (2021), or Sawmliana (2024). Enquiries among the local birders and exhaustive searches in social media sites such as *Facebook* and *Instagram* did not yield any reports from Mizoram. We therefore conclude that this is the first record of Long-billed Plover from the state of Mizoram.

Since there is no existing vernacular name in the Mizo language, we propose the name "Lente-hmuisei", where "lente" is the diminutive form of *Lailen*, the Mizo name for wintering wagtails and "hmui" means "bill" or "beak," and the descriptive suffix "-sei" signifies "long.".

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– Christopher J.Z. Lawlor, Hmar Lalthanzara, Thanliana Hauhnar, Carter Lalchhuanmawia & Patrick Zolawma Lawlor

Christopher J.Z. Lawlor, Department of Zoology, Government Kolasib College, Kolasib, 796081, Mizoram, India. ORCID ID: 0000-0001-9221-074X
E-mail: chrislawlor68@gmail.com [Corresponding author]
Hmar Lalthanzara, Department of Life Sciences, Department of Zoology, Pachhunga University College, Aizawl, 796081, Mizoram, India. E-mail: lalthanzara@pucollege.edu.in
Thanliana Hauhnar, Office of the Divisional Forest Officer, Kolasib Forest Division, Environment, Forest, and Climate Change Department, Kolasib, 796081, Mizoram, India.
E-mail: thanteahauhnar1969@gmail.com [TH]
Carter Lalchhuanmawia, College Veng, Kolasib, 796081, Mizoram, India.
E-mail: jimmycarterngente@gmail.com
Patrick Zolawma Lawlor, Department of Zoology, Government Kolasib College, Kolasib, 796081, Mizoram, India. E-mail: patrick.z.lawlor@gmail.com

A presumed Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra* x Siberian Stonechat *Saxicola maurus* hybrid from Goa, India

Hybridization refers to the breeding and generation of offsprings between individuals from genetically different populations (Harrison 1993). Among the majority of animals, hybridization in birds is more thoroughly documented due to their relatively unique plumage and relative visibility making them a good model system for this subject (Randler 2004). The genus *Saxicola* (bushchats or chats) comprises of 14 species, many of which

have overlapping ranges, such as, the Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra* and the European Stonechat *S. rubicola* (Kosicki 2022). However, information on hybrid individuals within this genus is very limited in existing literature. In this note, we document a record of a hybrid individual of the Whinchat and the Siberian Stonechat *S. maurus* from Ozarim, Goa, India (15.709°N, 73.867°E; 50 m asl).

Initially, this individual was observed on 28 November 2023 and identified as a Whinchat based on features, such as, a conspicuous supercilium, long projection of the primaries, and a pale sandy rump with faint traces of streaking and heavily streaked upperparts **[155, 156, 157]**. Further examination from photographs, however, revealed characteristics inconsistent with that of a Whinchat. Notably, the bird lacked the typical streaking on the rump and the tail appeared longer than usual. A subsequent visit on 31 December 2023 provided more photographic and videography evidence supporting the initial observations. Additionally, comments from several members on social media bird identification groups were strongly inclined towards Whinchat, primarily due to two features: the conspicuous supercilium and the faint traces of streaking on the pale sandy rump. However, Peter Clement and reviewers of a previous draft of this manuscript pointed out some of the initial inconsistencies in features supporting Whinchat. These were also observed by the authors in the field and are summarised below.

1. **Supercilium:** The bird had a bright and conspicuous supercilium, a trait rarely exhibited by Siberian Stonechats but typical of Whinchats **[155]**.
2. **Primary projection:** Initially thought to be long, however, a closer inspection revealed it to be relatively shorter and more compact, a characteristic aligning more with Siberian Stonechat **[156, 157]**.
3. **Upperparts:** The upperparts were heavily streaked, with dark centres and fine pale fringes, creating a broken effect more typical of Whinchat **[156, 157]**.
4. **Rump and uppertail-coverts:** The rump and uppertail-coverts were pale sandy or light orange, unlike the tawny-brown with darker tips shown in Whinchat, and more typical of Siberian Stonechat **[156, 157]**.
5. **Tail:** The tail was relatively long and did not display the broad white basal panels typical of Whinchat, further suggesting a Siberian Stonechat feature **[156, 157]**.
6. **Face pattern:** The face pattern, especially the supercilium, was broad and pale, more in line with Whinchat than Siberian Stonechat **[155]**.
7. **Bill:** The bill appeared quite heavy and deep at the base, unlike the slender bills of both Whinchat and Siberian Stonechat **[155]**.

155. The bird showing conspicuous supercilium and dark ear coverts.

156. The bird showing faint streaking on the rump.

All: Jalmesh Karapurkar

157. The bird showing heavily streaked upperparts.

Given these observations, the individual, observed at Ozarim, Goa does not fit neatly into the identification criteria of either Whinchat or Siberian Stonechat. This combination of a broad supercilium and streaked upperparts with a pale sandy rump and long tail suggests the possibility of hybridization between the two species. It is, however, also important to account for all known hybrids between Whinchat and other species. The first example type is hybrid of Common Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus* x Whinchat, from a bird trapped at Lista Bird Observatory, Norway, in September 2013, first proven case of intergeneric hybridization within the Muscicapidae by molecular evidence (Hogner et al. 2015). A similar case was suspected and presumed to be of this type from a bird photographed at Shetland, Scotland in September 2021 (Harvey & Riddington 2022). Upon comparison of the individual from Goa, with that from Shetland, we noted that the latter individual was different with respect to primary projection, which was longer, had a broader bill and dull supercilium, hence clearly eliminating this possibility. The next is hybrid of Siberian Stonechat x Grey Bushchat *S. ferreus*. However, we did not find any convincing records of such a hybrid during our literature review. The possibility of it being a Whinchat × Amur Stonechat *S. stejnegeri* was eliminated based on the breeding range of both the species which apparently have no overlap (Opaev et al. 2018). Although, there are five previous records of the Whinchat from the South Asia between 2017 and 2024 (Steiof et al. 2017; Magesh et al. 2022; Ashraf 2023; Stanba 2023; Chethan &

Prakash 2024; Magdum 2024) making this species an expected vagrant, the individual from Goa is the first presumed case of a hybrid between a Whinchat and Siberian Stonechat from India.

Hybridization between Whinchat and Siberian Stonechat is globally not well-documented, with the only known record from Finland, which was reported as an apparent hybrid between female Siberian Stonechat and male Whinchat in Siilinjarvi, Central Finland, in 1997 that had produced four young (Carter et al. 1999). However, no further information about this case, either with respect to the identification features of the young upon fledging or their survival, is available in literature. Hence, our record appears to be the first record which documents the some of the identification features shown in the Whinchat and Siberian Stonechat hybrid.

The breeding range of Whinchat stretches from Europe to the Middle East (Clement & Rose 2015; Collar & Garcia 2020), on the other hand, the Siberian Stonechat breeds throughout the Himalayas, Central Asia, eastern Europe, and parts of China (Opaev et al. 2018; Clements et al. 2024). The breeding ranges and seasons of these two species are known to overlap from northern to Eastern Europe, north of Asia and the Middle East (Fig. 1). Given that these areas are where both species co-occur during breeding seasons, it is possible that the hybrid individual found in Goa may have originated from these areas.

Recent studies have clarified that two subspecies of the Siberian Stonechat regularly winter in the Indian Peninsula: *S. m. maurus*, which breeds across eastern Russia and Central Asia, migrates south to winter in northern India, Iran, and Iraq; and, *S. m. indicus*, a resident breeder in the Himalayas, also winters widely across the Indian Subcontinent. Additionally, populations breeding in central Mongolia and the Himalayas have been confirmed to contribute significantly to wintering individuals in South Asia (Clements et al. 2024). While the precise origin of the presumed Whinchat × Siberian Stonechat hybrid individual observed in Goa cannot be confirmed without genetic data, its occurrence highlights the need for further research on migratory connectivity and population structure in Siberian Stonechats. Hypotheses on the origin of an individual and its species lineage can only be authoritatively established through genetic and molecular analysis, especially in cases of suspected hybridization, and by comparing their genetic data with samples from breeding ranges.

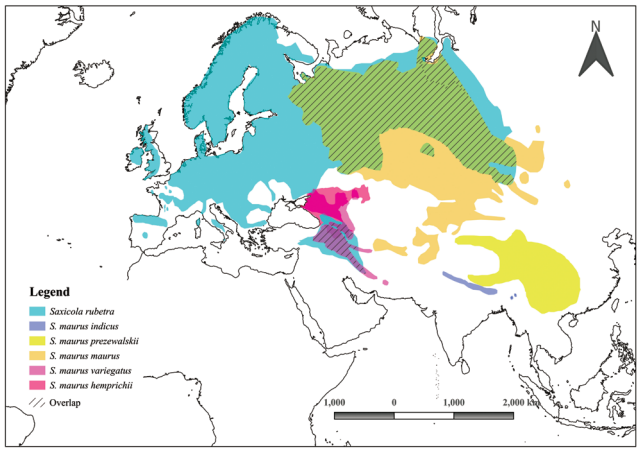

Fig. 1. Breeding distribution of *S. rubetra* (Clement & Rose 2015) and *S. maurus* (Opaev et al. 2018; Clements et al. 2024) showing zones of overlap, which are potential zones from which the observed hybrid of Whinchat × Siberian Stonechat in Goa could have possibly originated. Note: *S. m. armenicus* is treated as a junior synonym of *S. m. variegatus* (Svensson et al. 2012; Clements et al. 2024).

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– Kuldip Topo, Sagar Naik, Shubham Rane & Jalmesh Karapurkar

Kuldip Topo, Arannya Environment Research Organisation, Morlem, Sattari, Goa 403505, India.
Sagar Naik, School of Biological Sciences, Goa University, Taleigao Plateau, Goa 403206, India.
Shubham Rane, School of Biological Sciences, Goa University, Taleigao Plateau, Goa 403206, India.
Jalmesh Karapurkar, Arannya Environment Research Organisation, Morlem, Sattari, Goa 403505, India. Email: jalmesh.karapurkar@arannya.in [JK] [Corresponding author]

Status of Indian Nuthatch *Sitta castanea,* Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch *S. cinnamoventris,* and Velvet-fronted Nuthatch *S. frontalis* in Himachal Pradesh, India

Himachal Pradesh is a northern Indian state, located in the western Himalayan region. Four nuthatches are found in the state, White-tailed Nuthatch *Sitta himalayensis,* White-cheeked Nuthatch *S. leucopsis,* Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch *S. cinnamoventris,* and Velvet-fronted Nuthatch *S. frontalis* (Grimmett et al. 2011; Dhadwal 2019). First two are found at relatively higher altitude near treeline, reaching up to 3,300 m during summer, while the latter are usually found from plains to 1,800 m (the last one may reach up to 2,200 m locally) (Kazmierczak 2000). Historically, Indian Nuthatch *S. castanea* was treated as conspecific with Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch and Burmese Nuthatch *S. neglecta* (Grimmett