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The Ashy Woodswallow *Artamus fuscus* in Solan, Himachal Pradesh, India

The Ashy Woodswallow *Artamus fuscus* is a stocky bird with large silver bill, slate-grey head, brownish back, and pinkish grey underparts (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012; Rowley & Russell 2020). It is distributed across most of the Indian Subcontinent, extending eastward to Myanmar, southern & south-eastern China, Thailand and Indochina (Rowley & Russell 2020).

On 21 May 2022, CS and Geeta Goswami observed two birds perched on a high-tension wire, near a tall electricity tower, c.4 km from Dr. Yashwant Singh Parmar, University of Horticulture and Forestry, Nauni, Solan District, Himachal Pradesh (30.867°N, 77.193°E; c.1,230 m asl). They were identified as Ashy Woodswallows by their characteristic morphology. Subsequently, based on the information provided by CS, CA visited the location on 25 May 2022 and observed three Ashy Woodswallows [219]. The birds were seen flying over the hillside, with scattered trees and shrubs, and catching insects in the air and then returning to perch on the tower and wires to feed on the catch.

On 14 August 2022, HC photographed a flock of 12 Ashy Woodswallows at the same spot followed by a more recent sighting of two individuals on 04 April 2025. He also recalled an earlier observation of photographing two Ashy Woodswallows from the same location on 18 June 2019. These multiple sightings across three different years, suggest that the species may either be a resident or a regular summer visitor to this site. The former appears more likely, as the species is considered resident within its range (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). There is another independent record from Government Hospital, Nahan, Sirmour District (30.564°N, 77.296°E; c.925 m asl), dated 05 May 2016, where Ankit Vikrant recorded two Ashy Woodswallows in flight (Vikrant 2016). They were identified by robust built, broader wings

and slower flight than any other swallow and martin species known from the region (Ankit Vikrant pers. comm. dated 20 June 2025).

Ashy Woodswallow is mainly distributed in the eastern, north-eastern and southern India (Grimmett et al. 1998). Although its range is mentioned to extend from the Himalayan foothills of Himachal Pradesh (Ali & Ripley 1987; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012), only a single record is shown from Himachal Pradesh in the distribution map by Grimmett et al. (2011). A specimen of Ashy Woodswallow was collected and three others were observed at a site, 12–16 km from Solan Railway Station, on the Kalka-Shimla railway line, Solan District on 05 July 1925 (Basil-Edwards 1926). The specimen is currently housed in the collection of Bombay Natural History Society (Abdulali 1977) and may have been the basis for including Himachal Pradesh in the distribution range of the species. Dhadwal (2019) mentioned a record from Poanta Sahib, Sirmour District from 2018 from unknown source, though the record was deemed unverifiable by him in the absence of sufficient evidence. No other records of this species from Himachal could be traced. In the neighbouring state of Haryana, the species is scarce in Panchkula and Hathnikund-Kalesar area (Kalsi et al. 2019). In Dehradun District, the western end of Uttarakhand, Ashy Woodswallow is considered a rare resident (Singh 2000). Therefore, while the recent records from Solan are not entirely unexpected, they do confirm the presence of the Ashy Woodswallow in Himachal Pradesh. These also represent the first photographic records of the species from the state. So far, Solan and Sirmour are the only districts in Himachal Pradesh from where the species has been reported and the former seems to be the northern-most limit of the distribution range of the species.

CS thank Geeta Goswami for the company in the field.

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219. Ashy Woodswallow photographed resting on electric tower in Solan District, Himachal Pradesh on 25 May 2022.