

hodgsoniae and the Common Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia*. We started checking out the area around 0700 h but couldn't locate either of our targets immediately. Hence, we split up to cover a larger area. Sheela, Harshil, Sunil, and myself then came across a small group of warblers feeding on the bushes. We started taking photos immediately, aware that warblers are potentially difficult to id and that during passage, one may stumble upon a rarity.

We identified most of the warblers as Tickell's Leaf Warblers *Phylloscopus affinis*, but I zeroed in on a particular individual that seemed different. We immediately shifted focus to this individual and took more photos [190–192]. None of us could id this warbler in the field and we got excited thinking we may have discovered something new. Typical of passage migrants, there were no calls made by this individual.



190. Icterine Warbler showing sloping crown and olive-grey upper parts and a light wing panel



191. Icterine Warbler in flight showing yellowish underbody.



192. Icterine Warbler on the bush showing yellowish underbody.

The warbler was about the size of a Blyth's Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum*. It had a sloping crown, olive-grey upper parts, and a pale yellowish body and lower parts. There was no wing bar nor was there any noticeable supercilium. It had a thick and pointed bill and seem to have a light wing panel.

While we took more photos, it moved from bush to bush and finally flew away at which time Rigzin also spotted the same. The entire sighting was close to half an hour. I forwarded images to Shashank Dalvi, Harish Thangaraj, and Adesh Shivkar for their take on this bird. Merlin app had already given a couple of options and one of which was Icterine Warbler *Hippolais icterina*. Soon, I got confirmation from Harish that this was indeed an Icterine Warbler. We cross-referenced its features with our photos and found that the features including shape and size of the bill, plumage, pale wing panel, squarish tail, all matched. Specifically, the pale lemon yellow face to chin and throat continuing as pale yellow on to the rest of the underparts, the open face or featureless aspect with pale lemon yellow lores lacking any dark lines, the steep crown appearance, the greenish tinge to greyish-olive upperparts, the narrow whitish fringes to the secondaries, the long primary projection, the fairly short and relatively square-ended tail, the blue-grey legs, and the two-tone bill with pale orange base to lower mandible – all are diagnostic of this species. It is a bit difficult to age this bird but the worn state of the plumage might indicate this being an adult, which would turn into fresh plumage only after its late winter moult. A first winter bird in September would have recently acquired fresh plumage with buffish-yellow fringes to the greater coverts and quite broad fringes to the tertials – all of which does not seem to be the case with our bird.

This is the first record of Icterine Warbler in South Asia. It is mainly found in central and eastern Europe and migrates during the northern winter to eastern and southern Africa (Svensson 2020). The most easterly breeding distribution is in west-central Russia and northern Kazakhstan. One can speculate that this individual was on its way to Africa from these eastern-most breeding areas. After our report, no other birdwatching team has reported this species from Ladakh, indicating the bird might have moved on quickly.

I thank Peter Clement for reviewing this note and providing more details about its plumage.

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Western Tragopan *Tragopan melanocephalus* in the Kazinag National Park, Jammu & Kashmir, India

The Kazinag National Park (34.115°N–34.163°N, 74.001°E–74.155°E) is located along the north bank of the Jhelum River close to the Line of Control (LoC) in Baramulla District, about 70 km north-west of Srinagar, Jammu & Kashmir. Spanning in an area of 89 km² and elevation range of 1,800–4,300 m asl the park is home to an impressive faunal diversity including nearly 20 species of mammals such as the Kashmir Markhor *Capra falconeri*, Kashmir Muskdeer *Moschus cupreus*, Himalayan Brown Bear *Ursus arctos isabellinus*, Asiatic Black Bear *Ursus thibetanus*, Leopard *Panthera pardus*, and Kashmir Flying Squirrel *Eoglaucomys fimbriatus*. Moreover, over 120 bird species belonging to 36 families have

been recorded in the area (Department of Wildlife Protection, North Division Sopore, J&K 2021). Notably, seven Galliform species inhabit the region including Himalayan Snowcock *Tetraogallus himalayensis*, Himalayan Monal *Lophophorus impejanus*, Koklass Pheasant *Pucrasia macrolopha*, Cheer Pheasant *Catreus wallichii*, Kalij Pheasant *Lophura leucomelanos*, Chukar Partridge *Alectoris chukar*, and the iconic Western Tragopan *Tragopan melanocephalus*.

Renowned for its vibrant plumage and elusive behaviour, the Western Tragopan is among the most famed galliform species of the Western Himalaya. Historically, the presence of Western Tragopan in Jammu & Kashmir has been recorded from Uri, Keran, and Lolab areas of the Kashmir valley alongside the southern slopes of the Pir Panjal, Kishtwar, and Padder areas in the Jammu region (BirdLife International 2001). In the Kazinag area (then Limber Wildlife Sanctuary), the populations of Western Tragopan were first reported in 1989 (Kaul & Qadri 1989). Ahmad et al. (2017) used call count surveys across the Pir Panjal range and confirmed its presence in the Kazinag National Park. Despite historical records from the Kazinag region, the Western Tragopan has rarely been sighted in the area in recent decades. The first photograph of the bird from the area was taken in April 2023 (Jainy Maria & Mudassir Manzoor, pers. comm., July 2023).

Motivated by years of dedicated fieldwork and a long-standing aspiration to observe the species, MN initiated a targeted field effort to search for the species in the protected area. Based on the known habitat preference of the bird, as reported in the literature and supplemented by information from the experienced field assistants and local people, four potential survey sites were identified. Given the species' peak activity at dawn, the survey team aimed to reach each site during the early morning hours. Surveys were conducted over four consecutive days (26–29 May 2024), with each site visited on a separate day. For the first three days, the team was unsuccessful to spot the bird.

On the fourth day, the team started the trek early at 0100 hrs, and reached the survey location (c.2,700 m) at around 0400 hrs. Around 30 minutes after arrival, the pre-dawn silence was broken by the first call of a Western Tragopan, a characteristic nasal bleat *kuwaan* repeated at three-second intervals from a single direction. Shortly thereafter, a second call was heard from the opposite side, indicating the presence of at least two individuals. Both calls were recorded using mobile phones.

As daylight gradually improved, one of the field assistants detected some movement in a grassy patch. Using binoculars, a male Western Tragopan was seen slowly emerging from the undergrowth of Himalayan Bird Cherry *Prunus cornuta* [193].



Mehnaz Nazir

193. A male Western Tragopan observed in Kazinag National Park, Jammu & Kashmir.

Within moments, four females appeared nearby, providing a rare opportunity to observe and document both sexes together. The team observed the birds for about 20 minutes, maintaining a safe distance of c.200 m from the spot to avoid any disturbance. The male was observed foraging beneath a Himalayan Bird Cherry before moving to an adjacent bush, subsequently joined by a female. The other females followed, briefly engaging in agonistic behaviour before collectively retreating into cover. The birds eventually disappeared into the dense undergrowth with surrounding vegetation dominated by West Himalayan Fir *Abies pindrow*, Himalayan Birch *Betula utilis*, and Himalayan Maple *Acer oblongum*.

Endemic to the Western Himalaya (McGowan & Garson 1995), the Western Tragopan has a fragmented distribution, occurring from Indus-Kohistan District in northern Pakistan, east through Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh to Uttarakhand in northwest India (Awan et al. 2016; McGowan & Kirwan 2020). The species is predominantly confined to remote, high-elevation montane forests, naturally occurring at low population densities (Awan et al. 2016; Singh et al. 2020). Its pronounced dawn and dusk activity patterns (BirdLife International 2019) and strict habitat selectivity render it an ecological indicator of pristine Himalayan montane forests (Fuller & Garson 2000; Miller 2010). Although the species' small population size is often attributed to limited survey and monitoring efforts, it is classified as Vulnerable by IUCN Red List of Threatened Species and listed in Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Amendment Act, 2022. Population declines are attributed to factors such as deforestation, livestock browsing on understory shrubs, fodder and firewood collection, illegal hunting, and habitat degradation (Jameel et al. 2022; Shah et al. 2022).

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A Chestnut-winged Cuckoo *Clamator coromandus* from Kanha Tiger Reserve, Madhya Pradesh, India

The Chestnut-winged Cuckoo *Clamator coromandus* is a distinctive, long-tailed cuckoo with a prominent black crest, whitish collar, chestnut wings and a whitish belly (Grimmett et al. 2011). It is widely distributed across south and southeast Asia, with range extending from the Himalayan foothills in north India and Nepal to southeast China, Myanmar, east to Philippines. In winters, it migrates to southern India, Sri Lanka, and Greater Sundas (Payne & Kirwan 2020).

On 01 August 2022, we were birding in a privately owned woodland in the buffer zone of the Kanha Tiger Reserve (22.143°N, 80.656°E). At 0830 h, a movement was noticed about 5 m above ground, in the middle canopy of a Tamarind tree *Tamarindus indica*. Initially, we thought it to be a Greater Coucal *Centropus sinensis*, a common resident bird in the area, due to its dark and brownish plumage. As the bird emerged from foliage and flew to the top of a Harra tree *Terminalia chebula*, its long tail, slender body, and colouration suggested a Pied Cuckoo *C. jacobinus*. However, after observing carefully, the combination of a thick pointed crest, rich chestnut wings, and orange throat confirmed the identification as a Chestnut-winged Cuckoo. The bird then flew to a Lendia tree *Lagerstroemia parviflora* before finally disappearing into a patch of tall Sal *Shorea robusta* forest, extending towards the Banjaar River. Since no camera was available with us, we made the documentation using binoculars and a mobile phone [194, 195].

There are no previous records of the Chestnut-winged Cuckoo from Madhya Pradesh, nor is it included in the avifaunal checklists of the Kanha Tiger Reserve (Chandra et al. 2006; Dookia & Gupta 2008; Thakur 2009). However, the species was subsequently observed on 27 April 2023 by Anuranjan Singh Dhurwey (Park Guide, Kanha Tiger Reserve) and Shrikanth Nayak from Kanha Tiger Reserve (Dhurwey & Nayak 2023). Within the broader region, there are records from the Melghat Tiger Reserve in Amravati District, Maharashtra, located c.400



194. Chestnut-winged Cuckoo photographed using a binocular and mobile phone from Kanha Tiger Reserve, Madhya Pradesh, India.



195. Chestnut-winged Cuckoo showing the chestnut wings, long tail and orangish throat.

Both photos: Sijo K. J.

km south-west of the Kanha Tiger Reserve (eBird 2025), and from the Nandankanan Wildlife Sanctuary in Khordha District, Odisha situated c.750 km east of the Kanha (Mohapatra et al. 2019). The current observation represents the first photographic documentation of this bird from the region. The species may use Central India and the Eastern Ghats as a passage during migration to southern India and Sri Lanka.

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