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Great Nicobar Crake
Menetries's Warbler
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A Tale of Two Crakes from the Great Nicobar Island, India: The Red-legged Crake *Rallina fasciata* and the undescribed Great Nicobar Crake *Rallina* sp.

Pia Sethi, Nitu Sethi & Vikram Shill

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Introduction

Of the four species of the genus *Rallina* (Winkler et al. 2020) distributed across Asia and Australasia, three are currently known from India (eBird 2025; Praveen 2025). In addition, a putative, undescribed congener—the Great Nicobar Crake (hereinafter, GNCR)—was documented on Great Nicobar Island in 2012 (Rajeshkumar et al. 2012) and then photographed a second time in 2015 (Bharadwaj 2015; Kuriakose 2015) with VS. No further evidence on the GNCR has been gathered in the intervening decade. Within India, the current distributions of two *Rallina* species—the Andaman Crake *R. canningi* and the Red-legged Crake *R. fasciata* (hereinafter, RLCR)—are restricted to the Andaman and Nicobar Archipelago. The Andaman Crake is endemic to the Andaman Islands (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012), while Dalvi et al. (2021) documented RLCR from the Great Nicobar Island in 2021. Dalvi et al. (2021) also documented the Slaty-legged Crake *R. eurizonoides amauroptera* (hereinafter, SLCR) from the Great Nicobar Island; a species that was previously known from the Andaman and Nicobar archipelago only via two sightings (Raman et al. 2013; Gokulakrishnan 2020) in the Andaman Islands.

Here, we report sightings of RLCR and GNCR, from Campbell Bay, Great Nicobar Island including the first audio recording of the latter's calls. We analyse the call recordings of both the crakes and document the differences between them. We review the status of all three crake species—RLCR, GNCR, and SLCR—based on published and unpublished records and summarize their key identification features. Based on the review and an analysis of the call recordings, we discuss the taxonomic implications for the specific status of GNCR.

Methods

We made the observations during a birdwatching trip to Great Nicobar Island around Campbell Bay. PS took the photographs and we used mobile phones to record the calls. Comparison of phenotypes was based on our own observations supported by past photographs and descriptions given in prior works (Rajeshkumar et al. 2012; Bharadwaj 2015; Kuriakose 2015; Dalvi et al. 2021). A map was created using QGIS version 3.40.5-Bratislava. We used Ravenpro 1.6.5 (K. Lisa Yang Center for Conservation Bioacoustics at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology 2024) to prepare the spectrograms and summaries of call characteristics. We analysed a single bout of multi-note repeated phrases of one individual of each taxon, RLCR and GNCR, recorded from the Great Nicobar Island on a single occasion. We classified the call as notes and phrases as shown in Fig. 1. For the GNCR, the number of notes per phrase was calculated from 15 phrases, while the remaining metrics were derived from 14 phrases. In the case of the RLCR, we analysed 12 phrases. The resolution of geographical coordinates of the crakes provided here is at one decimal point considering the sensitiveness of the area.

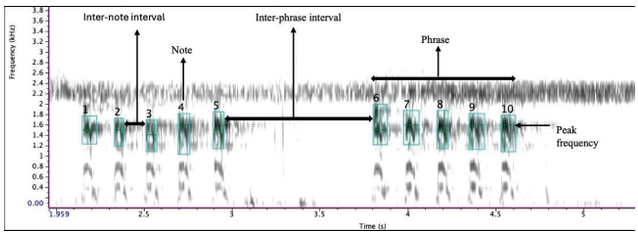


Fig 1. An illustration of phrase and note metrics used for analysing the sonograms of the crakes.

Red-legged Crake

On 17 May 2025, during our first evening in Campbell Bay, we set out to locate the endemic Nicobar Scops-Owl *Otus alius*. At 1855 h, while standing under a tree at the base of a hill, we heard a distinct, protracted *"UH-UH-UH"* call that continued for over 10 minutes. A small stream and wet area were located near the source of the call.

VS climbed the hill (7.0°N, 93.9°E; 30 m asl) and was able to record the call and locate the bird—an RLCR—roosting in a thicket of *Calamus*, bamboo, lianas, and vines. The bird had bold black-and-white barring on the belly, wing coverts with similar barring, red legs, and a reddish head and breast. The bill was a bluish-slate grey with a reddish gape, and the bird had a red orbital ring and orange-red iris. We photographed and videotaped the bird **[170–171]**. The bird had fallen silent by the time all of us saw it.

We returned to the site the following morning and again in the evening, but the bird did not call again. The bird had likely moved from its original roosting site. Over the next five days, we failed to hear any crake calls in Campbell Bay. We searched for SLCR at multiple sites including at some of the locations where Dalvi et al. (2021) had recorded them. We were unsuccessful

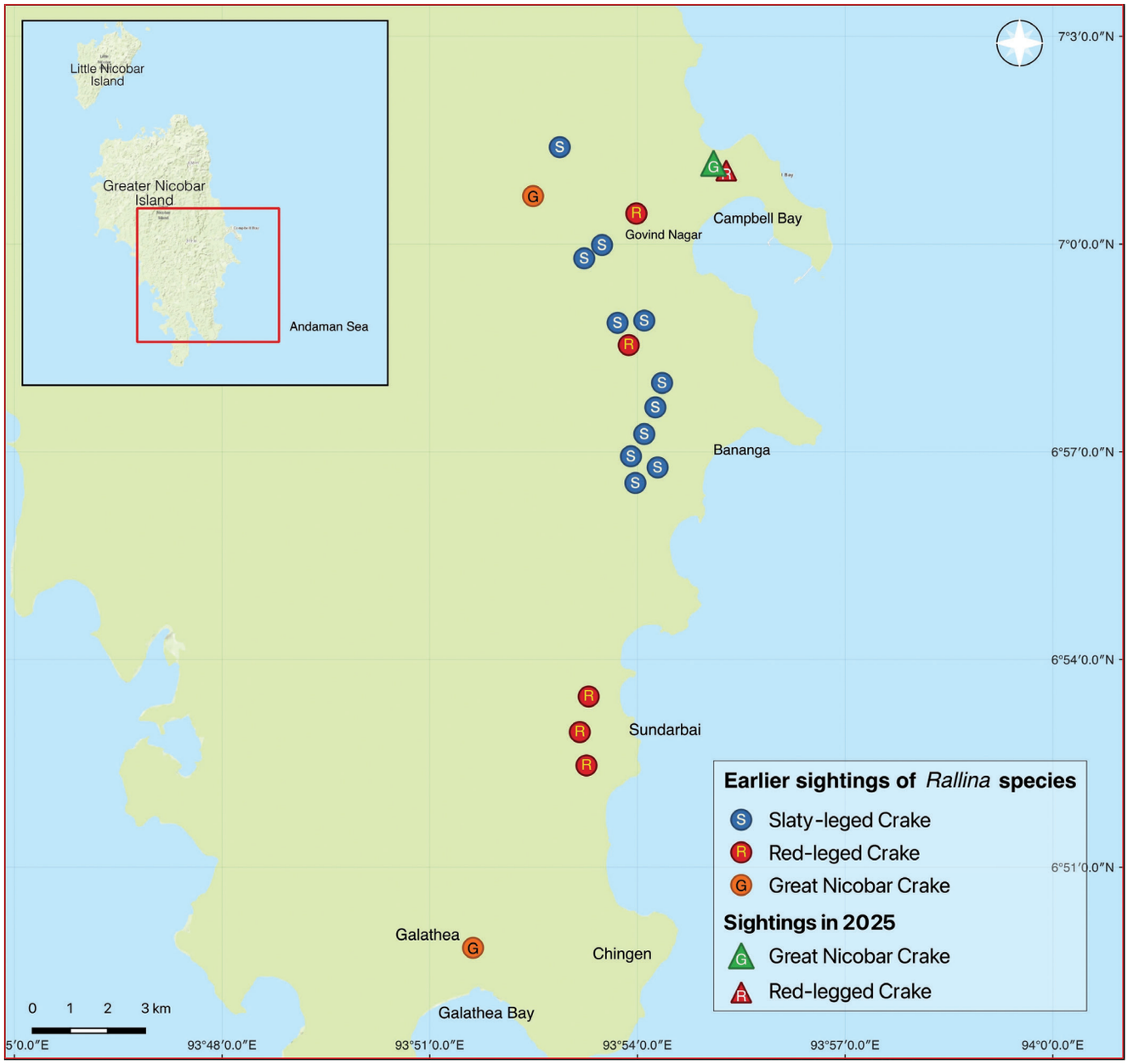


Fig 2: Map showing all known records of the Red-legged-, Slaty-legged-, and Great Nicobar Crakes from the Great Nicobar Island.

although Dalvi et al. (2021) had seen ten individuals between 09 March and 20 May 2021.

There have been no other subsequent sightings of RLCR from either the Nicobar Islands or elsewhere in India. However, a record from the Great Nicobar Island that predates Dalvi et al.'s observations (Janakarajan 2018) was recently uploaded to eBird—a photograph by Saravanan Janakarajan taken on 25 April 2018—which, technically represents the first confirmed Indian record of the species. We have added this record to the map of crake records from the Great Nicobar Island (Fig. 2).

Great Nicobar Crake

On the evening of 21 May 2025, at 1725 h, we were searching for the SLCR in a forested area (7.0°N, 93.9°E; elevation 20 m) of Campbell Bay, a short distance away from the RLCR site, when we heard a strange crake-like call. We recorded the vocalisation but did not see the bird. Although VS searched the area with a torch, the bird was not located that evening.

The next morning, at 0635 h, at the same site, a crake crossed the road a few metres ahead of us and disappeared into the roadside vegetation on a gently undulating hill. We obtained a few blurry photographs **[172–176]**. The bird reappeared shortly after on the hillside, allowing for a brief video recording as it crossed the road, before it again vanished into the undergrowth.

The crake was approximately the same size as the Andaman Crake and closely resembled earlier photographs of the GNCR taken by prior workers (Rajeshkumar et al. 2012; Bharadwaj 2015; Kuriakose 2015). It had a pale green, stout bill with a thick base; reddish upperparts with reddish brown wings; a short brown tail; orange-red legs (that look more orange in the video

170. Red-legged Crake showing bold black-and-white barring on the belly and red legs.

Both photos: Pia Sethi

171. Red-legged Crake displaying a well-marked red gape, white belly with black bands, and pinkish-red legs.

than in the photographs) with dark claws; and red orbital skin around a red iris. The broad black and fine white barring on the wing coverts was visible in the photographs, though the barring on its underparts while visible, is fuzzy. In the video (Sethi 2025), narrow white and broad black banding on the underparts and upper thighs is visible as the bird descends a hill. However, the barring is less distinct than in earlier published photographs—likely due to low image quality. Nevertheless, we observed the barring on the sides of the belly and the upper thighs in the field.

Our report of GNCR from a new location in Campbell Bay, exactly a decade after it was last observed in the Galathea region, and 14 years after its sighting at the Govind Nagar tsunami shelter area of the island, adds to the knowledge of its continued presence on the island (Fig. 2).

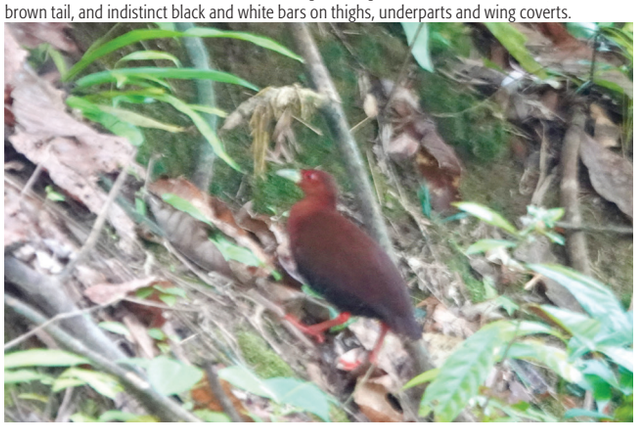
Preliminary analysis of the calls of the Great Nicobar Crake and the Red-legged Crake

GNCR called once in the evening of 21 May and then again, the following morning. The call consisted of a series of multi-note, repeated phrases. Each phrase consists of loud *UH-UH-UH-UH-UH-UH* notes. A summary of the call characteristics of GNCR and RLCR is presented in Table 1. Our sample size was too small to perform any meaningful statistical analysis. Nevertheless, we compared this single call of the GNCR with that of RLCR call that we recorded on the Great Nicobar Island.

The sonograms and calls of GNCR (Fig. 3) and RLCR (Fig. 4) look and sound similar. There are, however, some auditory differences (Fig. 5), with the call of GNCR sounding

172. The Great Nicobar Crake showing stout pale bill and orange-red legs.

173. The Great Nicobar Crake with thick orange-red legs and tarsi with dark claws, short brown tail, and indistinct black and white bars on thighs, underparts and wing coverts.



174. The Great Nicobar Crake with a pale green, stout bill with broad base, reddish plumage with darker reddish brown back, thick red eye ring with red iris. Wing coverts with broad black and narrow white barring.

All photos: Pia Sethi

175. The Great Nicobar Crake with a short, stout pale green bill, relatively long neck, rounded head, thick legs and toes.

Pia Sethi

176. The Great Nicobar Crake scarpering for cover with head jutting forward and tail lowered.

more halting and stuttering than that of RLCR. GNCR gave shorter bouts of vocalizations consisting of four to seven notes per phrase (5.13±0.74; N=15) with five being the most frequent; delivered at a rate of 5.6–6.4 notes/sec (6.07±0.23; N=14). The individual notes are more widely spaced (0.13±0.02s; N=70) than those of RLCR (0.03±0.01s; N=101). The phrases of RLCR consisted of 8–9 notes and the intervals between phrases was longer (2.61±0.3s; N=12) compared to that of GNCR (1.09±0.21s; N=14).

The harmonics of GNCR notes ranged from 0.1–1.8 kHz (N=77), although most of the sound appears to be in the range 1.2–1.7 kHz (N=70), with a peak frequency of the notes at 1.5 kHz (N=77). In case of RLCR, the harmonics of the notes ranged from 0.3–1.8 kHz (N=101), with most of the sound in the bottom two harmonics between 0.3–1.4 kHz (N=101), with a peak frequency of the notes at 1.1 kHz (N=101).

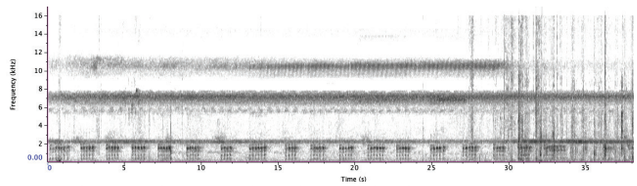


Fig. 3. Vocalizations of the Great Nicobar Crake recorded on the morning of 22 May 2025.

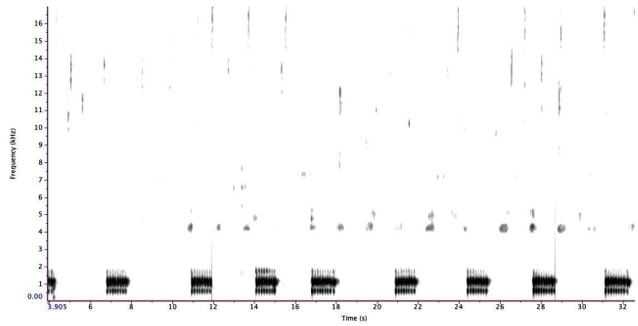


Fig. 4. Vocalizations of the Red-legged Crake from Great Nicobar Island recorded on 17 May 2025.

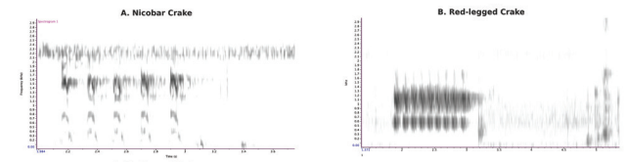


Fig. 5. Enlarged sonogram of one phrase each of the Great Nicobar Crake and the Red-legged Crake.

Table 1. Summary of Call Characteristics for the Great Nicobar Crake and Red-legged Crake. All metrics are expressed as mean ± standard deviation (number of samples)

Metric	Great Nicobar Crake	Red-legged Crake
Number of notes per phrase	5.13 ±0.74 (N=15)	8.42±0.51 (N=12)
Number of notes per second	6.07±0.23 (N=14)	7.77±0.20 (N=12)
Phrase duration (s)	0.83±0.11 (N=14)	1.08±0.08 (N=12)
Inter-phrase interval (s)	1.09±0.21 (N=14)	2.61±0.30 (N=12)
Note duration (s)	0.06±0.01 (N=70)	0.11±0.01 (N=101)
Inter-note interval (s)	0.13±0.02 (N=70)	0.03±0.01 (N=101)
Peak frequency (kHz)	1.52±0.05 (N=70)	1.10±0.04 (N=101)

The Great Nicobar Crake: New species or hybrid?

Rajeshkumar et al. (2012) compared the morphology of GNCR with that of RLCR, SLCR, the Andaman Crake, and the Band-bellied Crake *Zapornia paykullii*. They concluded that its novel suite of traits––such as the pale green bill, the broad black banded underparts and the orange-red legs––and its distinct differences from the above species warranted recognition as a distinct *Rallina* species, pending a full species description. However, Dalvi et al.'s (2021) discovery of other *Rallina* species, i.e., RLCR and SLCR on the Great Nicobar Island—species unknown from the island when Rajeshkumar et al. made their observations—led them to speculate that GNCR may be a hybrid, especially because of their observation that SLCR responded to RLCR playback, although they sound very different.

While the general vocal resemblance of RLCR and GNCR might lend some support to the hypothesis that all GNCR individuals reported were hybrids, we reason that at this stage several factors bolster Rajeshkumar et al.'s (2012) hypothesis that this is a species novel to science and not a hybrid.

Diagnosability of traits: GNCR differ significantly in morphological traits from the two other crake species found on the island, namely RLCR and SLCR (see Table 2). The former appears larger with a stout pale green bill rather than a bluish-slate grey one with thick orange-red legs as compared with RLCR's thin, pinkish-red ones, and thicker toes. The underparts have broad black bands with thin white barring, contrasting with the bold black and white bands on the belly of RLCR. The thigh feathers are also dark rather than white. GNCR lacks spots on the upper-wing coverts and has narrower and indistinct barring on the marginal wing coverts as compared to RLCR.

Similarly, GNCR differs from SLCR by its stout, shorter, pale green bill rather than a blue-grey or dusky grey one with a greenish tinge to the base of the lower mandible; its heavier, thick orange-red rather than slaty-coloured legs with shorter toes; its larger, redder eye with red orbital skin versus the pale eye ring in SLCR; its rounder head; its shorter, stockier body; its erect posture; and its paler, more rufescent back that lacks contrast with the head and neck. The underparts differ in having narrow white barring, dark thigh feathering with narrow bands, and fine black and white barring on the secondaries bordering the edge of the wing.

Consistency of traits: There have been three independently verifiable sightings of this species from various localities of the island over more than a decade. All these individuals consistently display the same morphological features—including a novel suite

Table 2. Morphological comparison of distinctive traits of the Great Nicobar Crake (GNCR) relative to the Red-legged- (RLCR) and the Slaty-legged Crakes (SLCR).

Species	Red-legged Crake [170–171]	Great Nicobar Crake [172–176]	Slaty-legged Crake [177]
Size, stance, and structure	Appears smaller and slimmer than the GNCR	Round head and distinct neck, deeper and shorter body than SLCR and more erect body	Less round head than GNCR with less distinct neck
Bill	Bluish, slate-grey with red gape	Stout, pale green with broad base	Blue-grey to dusky grey with greenish base to lower mandible, longer and less blunt than GNCR
Iris and orbital eye ring	Red with red orbital skin	Red with red orbital skin	Red with pale grey-pink orbital skin
Plumage	Brown, contrasting with chestnut orange head and neck	Reddish brown, lacking contrast with head and neck	Dark brown, strongly contrasting with rufous head and neck
Upperparts	Spots on upper wing coverts, wings distinctly and broadly barred giving the appearance of a prison uniform, underwings white with black barring	Spots absent on upper wing coverts and barring restricted to wing coverts. Barring indistinct with very thin white bars and broad black ones.	White bars on wings confined to inner webs of remiges (and are not usually visible) and a few coverts—generally lacking black and white barring on wing coverts. Underparts boldly black and white striped with narrower and more numerous white bars than RLCR
Underparts	Bold white and black barring on belly,	Broad black and indistinct fine white barring	Bold black and white barring on underparts
Legs	Pinkish-red, slim with white feathering	Orange-red, thick. dark, very narrowly barred thigh feathering	Slate-grey legs
Toes	Long toes	Proportionately shorter and thicker toes	Long toes

of traits—suggesting a stable phenotype. Since our submission, there have been two more GNCR photographic reports on eBird, showing all these traits consistently.

Lack of intermediate traits and emergence of novel ones: Hybrids, expectedly, display intermediate traits with a mosaic of parental characters, some of them being dominant (McCarthy 2006; Gholamhosseini et al. 2023). In contrast, GNCR individuals present a novel suite of traits that are not seen in either RLCR or SLCR including their stout, pale green bills; orange-red, thick legs; underparts with broad black and indistinct fine white bands; and rufescent upperparts. These traits again suggest that GNCR is unlikely to be a RLCR x SLCR hybrid. There are, however, documented instances of novel phenotypes emerging in wild hybrids (e.g., in buntings, see Gholamhosseini et al. 2023), so this alone does not provide unequivocal evidence to refute the hybrid theory, but rather serves as supporting evidence.

Response to playback: Regarding the response to call playback (Dalvi et al. 2021), it is not uncommon for members of the Rallidae family to respond to the calls of heterospecifics (see, Jedlikowski et al. 2021a, b), although the intensity and type of the response and calling rate might vary. Moreover, multiple rail species also give very similar calls and trill series, such as various forms of the Clapper Rail and King Rail (Stiffler et al. 2018). Hence, such responses to playback alone should not be taken as evidence that the observed GNCR individuals were of hybrid origin.

Esha Munshi

177. Slaty-legged Crake

Apparent rarity: Compared with other endemic birds of the Nicobar Islands, there have been only three reports of GNCR in more than a decade. All these reports come from the eastern border of the Great Nicobar Island, which has more settlements and is more accessible to birders and researchers. The remoteness of the island, limited visitation, strictly enforced access restrictions including to some of its protected areas such as the Great Nicobar Biosphere Reserve, and the dense tropical rain and littoral forest all likely contribute to the paucity of sightings. These factors may have obscured its true distribution, which might be more widespread on the island. Rallids are shy, secretive inhabitants of isolated habitats (Winkler et al. 2020), that are difficult to locate except when they vocalize.

Discussion

Our third sighting of RLCR from a new locality in Campbell Bay strengthens the likelihood of a small, resident population of this species on Great Nicobar Island, especially because Dalvi et al. (2021) observed individuals defending territories in May 2021. The species is known to be resident on the nearby island of Sumatra, Indonesia (Dalvi et al. 2021)—*c.* 150 km from the Great Nicobar Island.

GNCR has only been photographed twice before, in 2012 and 2015, and there are no prior audio or video recordings. Nothing is known about its biology, distribution, or population status. Nevertheless, sightings over more than a decade from different locations on the island, all displaying a consistent and distinctive set of morphological features, including several novel ones, strongly suggests that this might be a species new to science. We currently have only one call recording of GNCR and its vocal repertoire remains unknown. However, though its call is similar to that of RLCR, it does demonstrate some different characteristics. Multiple sightings of this potentially new and intriguing taxon about which so little is known, warrants immediate phylogenomic work especially because the discovery of new taxa of charismatic

vertebrates, like birds, is rare (Rheindt et al. 2020). More call recordings, and if possible morphometric measurements, would also be useful. A species new to science from the biodiversity-rich Great Nicobar Island will be a notable addition to India's avifauna.

The conservation of GNCR's habitat—the biogeographically and biologically unique Great Nicobar Island—is also of paramount importance. As part of a global biodiversity hotspot and Endemic Bird Area, the island supports staggeringly high, and irreplaceable levels of floral and faunal endemism and diversity (UNESCO 2025). Unfortunately, rail species on oceanic islands are highly vulnerable to extinction (Steadman & Martin 2003) from non-native predators, competitors, habitat destruction, and fragmentation. More than 26 species have gone extinct in the last 400 years (Steadman & Martin 2003), some possibly even before being described. We hope that GNCR, unlike some other rail species, does not end up as just another extinction statistic, even before it is described.

Acknowledgements

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Mynall in Travancore: Present-day location of a historical type locality

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'Mynall in Travancore' is a familiar location for nature enthusiasts who dig in to the past or refer literature of species description. It was an estate run by the British in the Thiruvananthapuram district of Kerala, India. Once upon a time the estate was established in the pristine forest of the southern Western Ghats and some naturalists of the British administration used it for their explorations. References mostly include correspondences between naturalists like Hume and Moore with either Frank W. Bourdillon or his brother Fulton T. Bourdillon, mostly published in *Stray Feathers* by A. O. Hume during 1872–1888 period.

Despite these frequent references, somewhere in the course of time, Mynall vanished from further accounts and in the present age, the locality is considered untraced (Lozupone et al. 2004:122) or sometimes incorrectly attributed. One such instance is when (Eck & Martens 2006) changed Mynall to 'Mynali' without sufficient inputs (Praveen 2025). Only mention of Mynall on a map appears on the inside cover of *Birds of Kerala* (Ali 1984), but the small-scale map can only point to a vague location. Hence, I made some investigation into this aspect to gain a few lines of evidence that can provide rough coordinates of Mynall.

Table 1. List of important specimens that bear the collection locality as Mynall (listed chronologically)
NHMUK: Natural History Museum, London, ZSI: Zoological Survey of India Collections

Sl. No	Species	Year of Collection	Notes	Specimen Numbers	References
1	Sri Lanka Frogmouth *Batrachostomus monilinger*	1874, 1875, & 1876	Two skins exist in NHMUK. Nest with remains of egg by T. F. Bourdillon was a first report. The *pullus* [=chick] dated 24 February 1875 must have been from this nest.	NHMUK#1887.8.1.806 NHMUK#1887.8.1.807 NHMUK#1887.8.1.808 (*pullus*)	Hume (1890a):38
2	Bourdillon's Dark fronted Babbler *Dumetia atriceps bourdilloni*	1875, 1877, & 1878	Holotype and two other specimens in NHMUK.	NHMUK#1886.10.1.6531 (Holotype) NHMUK#1886.10.1.6530 NHMUK#1880.8.19.19	Hume (1876b)
3	Legge's Hawk Eagle *Nisaetus kelaarti*	1876 & 1878	Three skins, one undated, obtained by Mr. Bourdillon at Mynall are one of the first skins from India.	NHMUK#1880.8.19.91, NHMUK#1885.8.19.1440 NHMUK#1885.8.19.1407	Blanford (1895):354; Whistler & Kinnear (1936):426 Gjershaug et al. (2008):66
4	Travancore Puff-throated Babbler *Pellorneum ruficeps granti*	1877	Holotype in NHMUK. Synonymized with *P. r. olivaceum* Jerdon, 1839 (Thrissur, Kerala) by Deignan (1947):3.	NHMUK#1886.10.1.4821	Harington (1913)
5	Travancore Black-lored Tit *Machlolophus aplonotus travancoreensis*	1874 & 1877	Holotype and two other specimens from Mynall in NHMUK.	NHMUK#1880.8.19.109 (Holotype) NHMUK#1880.8.19.132 NHMUK#1886.11.1.301	Whistler & Kinnear (1932):520
6	Ashambu Laughingthrush *Montecincla meridionalis*	1879 & 1880	All three syntypes used in original description, including two from Mynall, are in NHMUK. Two typotypes in ZSI (though one is labelled as a syntype), and another specimen from Mynall also at NHMUK.	NHMUK#1880.8.19.11 (Syntype) NHMUK#1880.8.19.161 (Syntype) NHMUK#1886.10.1.2951 ZSI#12142 (Typotype) ZSI#35453 (Typotype)	Blanford (1880); Sakthivel et al. (2011):35
7	Southern Sullied Sailer *Neptis clinia kallaura* Phylum: Arthropoda, Class: Insecta, Order: Lepidoptera, Family: Nymphalidae	Pre-1881	Syntypes probably in the ZSI collection, one from Kallaur [=Kallar] Road and another from Mynall. Catalogue numbers unknown.		Moore (1881):309
8	Tortulosa Snail sp. *Tortulosa albescens* Phylum: Mollusca, Class: Gastropoda, Order: Architaenioglossa, Family: Pupinidae	Pre-1881	Syntypes	NHMUK#1906.05.05.69	Blanford (1881):215; Raheem et al. (2014):51
9	Dakhan Two-eyed Treebrown *Lethe drypetis todara* Phylum: Arthropoda, Class: Insecta, Order: Lepidoptera, Family: Nymphalidae	Pre-1882	One of the first specimens from Kerala, probably still in the ZSI collection. Catalogue numbers unknown.		Marshall & de Nicéville (1882):151

Faunistic references

The first reference to Mynall was in 1875 under the account of the Great Eared Nightjar *Lyncornis macrotis bourdilloni*. Here, the mention of Mynall is only as a relative reference for another locality which is a hillmen's clearing '…on the banks of the Peenaven-aur about 15 miles north of this (Mynall), at an elevation of 600 feet above sea level' (Hume 1875:302). Presumably, Hume inserted this locality to signify what 'this' means. However, Mynall does not seem to indicate type locality as the type specimen (NHMUK# 1887.8.1.849) has a location put as 'Kalland, Khauni, south Travancore, 15 Jan. 1875' (Warren 1966) and this location may have been '15 miles north' of Mynall. Later, other authors including Marshall, Blanford, de Nicéville, Sharpe, Baker, Whistler, and Salim Ali have liberally quoted information from Mynall mostly referring to the notes published by Hume or having access to the specimens collected by the Bourdillons. Search for Mynall in Biodiversity Heritage Library (www.biodiversitylibrary.org) revealed 118 publications, though some of them are duplicates. Several faunae have been collected from this locale during the late 19th century; some of them are in fact type specimens preserved in the Natural History Museum, London (NHMUK) or at the Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) (Table 1). The online database of Global Biodiversity Information Facility (www.gbif.org) has 15 occurrence records of fauna collected during 1874 to 1886. In the first list of birds of Travancore prepared by Bourdillon, Mynall is mentioned against five species, namely, Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*, Crested Goshawk *Lophospiza trivirgata*, Black Eagle *Ictinaetus malaiensis*, Sri Lanka Frogmouth *Batrachostomus monilinger*, and Crested Treeswift *Hemiprocne coronata* (Hume 1876a). A collection of '201 birds' was purchased in 1880 from 'Mr. Frank Bourdillon' by NHMUK (Sharpe 1906) and most of them have been from Mynall as evident from the number of references in latter works of Salim Ali and Hugh Whistler.

Etymology

Though the name 'Mynall' sounds to be of a Malayalam origin, the regional language of erstwhile princely state of Travancore (now Kerala), this is most likely not the case. Most of the estates of the British in Travancore were named in English; Bonacaud, Brimore, Eridge, and Seafield just to name a few from a dozen others. When traced, places with these names exist in the United Kingdom or in the commonwealth countries like Canada, South Africa, and Australia, and hence certainly are of English, Scottish, or Irish origin. There are family lineages with their surname 'Mynall' in England. Possible variations of the surname include Minall, Mynell, Minell, or Mynell. The name 'Mynall' could have also originated from a small market town in England, named Mildenhall (pronounced /ˈmaɪnəl/) in Wiltshire, England. Hence, it is probably not a good idea to attempt finding similar sounding Malayalam names for geolocating Mynall, like attempted by some earlier ornithologists (e.g., Eck & Martens 2006).

History

Mynall Estate was a result of cultivation of coffee in Travancore. Idea of plantations in the province started when the price of coffee in the western world experienced a rapid rise. During 1858, forests of Ashambu hills were cleared for coffee plantation. North of Ashambu hills, 500 acres of wooded land was allotted to a Scottish planter John Grant, aimed at large scale production of coffee (Prakash 2018). Grant, a pioneer in coffee plantation in Sri Lanka, established his new estate by 1864 at Mahendragiri in Kanyakumari district (Mateer 1883:228), which probably is the first coffee plantation in this general area, that soon expanded across Travancore.

However, the only record of Mynall as a coffee estate is in Salim Ali's *Birds of Kerala* (Ali 1984:11), who obtained the geographic details of Mynall from A. J. Moore of Merchiston Estate, Kallar. Additionally, Ali states that Bourdillon brothers owned Mynall or Pallipara Coffee Estate, and when coffee failed, Frank Bourdillon returned to England while Fulton joined government service to eventually become the Conservator of Forests. All coffee plantations in Travancore faced a severe leaf disease and was ravaged by heavy monsoon; hence, the crop pattern had to be changed (Mateer 1883). Entries in two editions of Travancore Almanac (Table 2) indicates that the crop transitioned to tea while Fulton Bourdillon was the proprietor. However, by 1905, Mynall has been listed as just 'forest' with a new proprietor, James Finch. However, all volumes of Almanac that referred to Mynall Estate clearly listed Pallipara as its Malayalam name. Hence, there is little doubt that both are synonymous. In a few years, Mynall and Pallipara disappeared from the list of estates in Ponmudi, starting with the *Travancore Almanac and Directory for 1911* (1910):147.

Altitude

The main contention points for figuring out the location is the documentation of different altitudes (Table 3) for Mynall and the specimens labelled as Mynall being of some birds with a narrow altitude range. Very few specimens from Bourdillon have altitude mentioned in their original labels. Most natural history works provide an altitude of 2,000 ft [=610m] for Mynall. However, there are some cases where it is as low as 1,500 ft [=460m] or as high as 2,600 ft [=790m], with the extreme being 4,000 ft [=1,220m]. In addition, we are also in receipt of a photograph from NHMUK with the original tag of the type specimen of *Dumetia atriceps bourdilloni* as 3,500 ft [=1,066m].

Surprisingly, Bourdillon himself documented Pallipara as a 'rounded hill near Chemmunji, and about 3,500 ft. high' [=1,066m] while Chemmunji peak (8.679°N, 77.193°E) itself is listed at 4,000 ft. [=1,220m] (Bourdillon 1893:35). Hence, it is possible that Pallipara [=Mynall] Estate may be different from Pallipara hill; perhaps the former is at the foothills of the latter. It may be noted that the correct altitude of the well-known Chemmunji peak is 1,717m and the disparity with Bourdillon's

Table 2. List of entries in Travancore Almanac with details of acreage of Mynall listed under Ponmudi district

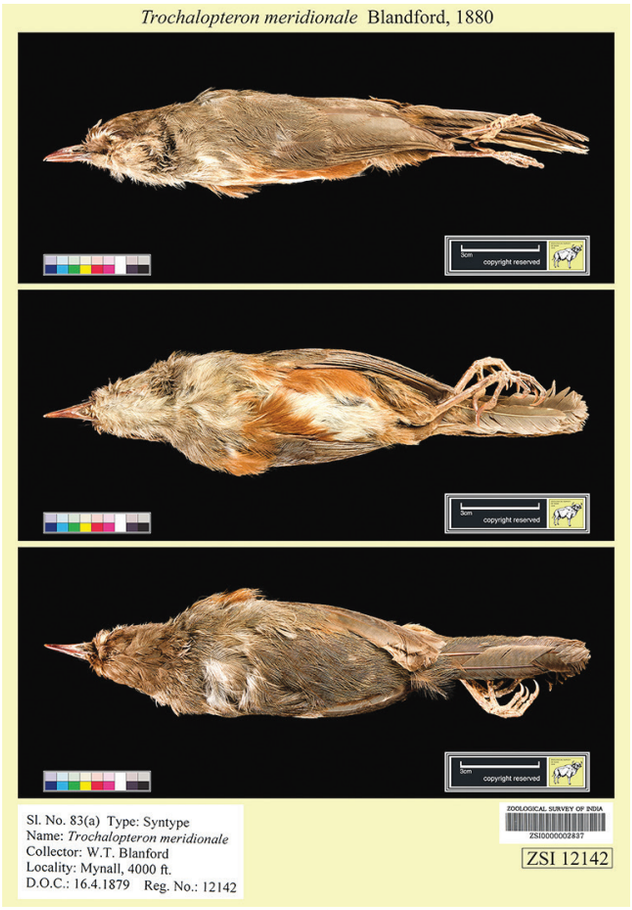
Almanac Year	Name of Estate	Malayalam Name	Proprietor, Manager & Assistant Superintendent	Land use: Acres	Reference
1895	Mynall	Pallipara	T. F. Bourdillon, J. S. Valentine	Tea: 7	Travancore Almanac of 1895 (1894):383
1898	Mynall	Pallipara	T. F. Bourdillon, J. S. Valentine, C. F. Ewart	Tea: 30	Travancore Almanac of 1898 (1897):154
1905–1907	Mynall	Pallipara	James Finch	Forest: 550	Travancore Almanac of 1905 (1904):244; Travancore Almanac of 1906 (1905):219; Travancore Almanac of 1907 (1906):132

Table 3. Altitude references to Mynall or Pallipara in literature (listed chronologically)

Sl. No	Altitude	Phrasing	Reference
1	2,000 ft [=610m]	"A young male killed at Mynall on the 6th August at an elevation of about 2,000 feet, clearly…" under the account of Crested Goshawk	Hume (1876a):355
2	2,000 ft [=610m]	"The specimen, like the female, was shot at Mynall, in South Travancore at an elevation of about 2,000 feet above the sea level" under the account of Sri Lanka Frogmouth	Hume (1876a):379
3	4,000 ft [=1,220m]	"The three specimens were all shot at an elevation of 4000 feet. Two are from Mynall, one from the Travancore and Tinnevelly boundary" under the type description of Ashambu Laughingthrush.	Blanford (1880):143
4	2,000 ft [=610m]	"Hab. Travancore, Kallaur Road, 1200 feet, April; Mynall, 2000 feet (Bourdillon)" under the type account of Southern Sullied Sailor *Neptis kallaura.* However, later Moore (1890):238 contradicted himself by stating 2,700 feet for Mynall. I have chosen his first reference as the second could even be a printing mistake.	Moore (1881):309
5	2,000 ft [=610m]	"We have specimen taken at Mynall 2,000 feet elevation" under the account of Dakhan Two-eyed Treebrown *Lethe drypetis todara*.	Marshall & de Niceville (1882):151
6	2,600 ft [=790m]	"We possess the wet-season form from Mynall, 2600 feet, in Travancore" under the account of White Four-ring *Ypthima hubneri*	Moore (1890):80
7	1,500 ft [=460m]	"Mynall, Travancore, 1500 feet" while listing a series of specimens of Common Sailor *Neptis hylas varmona*	Moore (1890):231
8	3,500 ft [=1,066m]	"Pallipara, a rounded hill near Chemmunji, and about 3,500 ft. high…" under the most important peaks of Paloda [=Palode] river. No mention of Mynall	Bourdillon (1893):35
9	3,510 ft [=1,070m]	"Pallipara hill 3510", listed in Appendix XIV of list of elevations under "The Paloda or Vamanapuram river". No mention of Mynall.	Bourdillon (1893):xlv
10	2,000–2,500 ft (600–760m)	"Two brothers who owned Mynall or Pallipara Coffee Estate (near Ponmudi in S. Travancore, *c.* 2,000–2,500 feet) in the 1870s…" under the account of T. Fulton and Frank Bourdillon.	Ali (1984):11

work cannot be easily explained as a trigonometric error since the same page has the height of Agasthayamala (referred to as Agasthyar peak) at 6,200 ft [=1,890m], which is very close to the present day documented height of 1,869m [=6,132 ft]. Hence, the fact that Pallipara hill could actually be a few hundred meters higher than Bourdillon's documented height cannot be discounted. It is also clear that Bourdillon sometimes collected outside Mynall and correspondents like Hume may have transcribed in a way that indicates all specimens to have come from a single locality, Mynall. For e.g., under the account of Black-and-orange Flycatcher *Ficedula nigrorufa*, Hume quotes Bourdillon writing from Mynall Estate as "…found in dense jungle at an elevation of 3700 to 4000 feet. The bird is not uncommon here…" (Hume 1890b). However, it is not explicitly mentioned whether Bourdillon's observations were from Mynall or at a higher altitude. Sometimes, there is an explicit mention of records from 'near Mynall' whence the altitude is slightly higher '2700 feet', like the case of Lesser False Vampire Bat *Megaderma spasma* (Blanford 1888:264).

Breeding records of Greater Racket-tailed Drongo *Dicrurus paradiseus*, Southern Hill Myna *Gracula indica*, Sri Lanka Frogmouth, Dollarbird *Eurystomus orientalis*, Crested Goshawk, and Black-and-orange Flycatcher from Mynall (Hume 1889, 1890b, a) lead us to presume that the site may not have a single elevation but rather, a range of heights. Thus, the various altitudes of Mynall (Table 2) may be likely, considering an estate on a sloping hill. However, the presence of Ashambu Laughingthrush *Montecincla meridionalis* in Mynall (Blanford 1880; Sakthivel et al. 2011), whose syntypes, all three of them, are in NHMUK with typotypes in ZSI **[178]**, takes this range much higher, as documented in Blanford (1880):143. From what we understand of the species now, Ashambu Laughingthurush could hardly be found at an elevation below 1,200m [=3,940 ft]; hence at least 500 ft below the highest documented elevation of Pallipara,



178. Typotype of Ashambu Laughingthrush in ZSI collections. Altitude in the label was taken from the type description by Blanford. Reproduced with permission from Zoological Survey of India

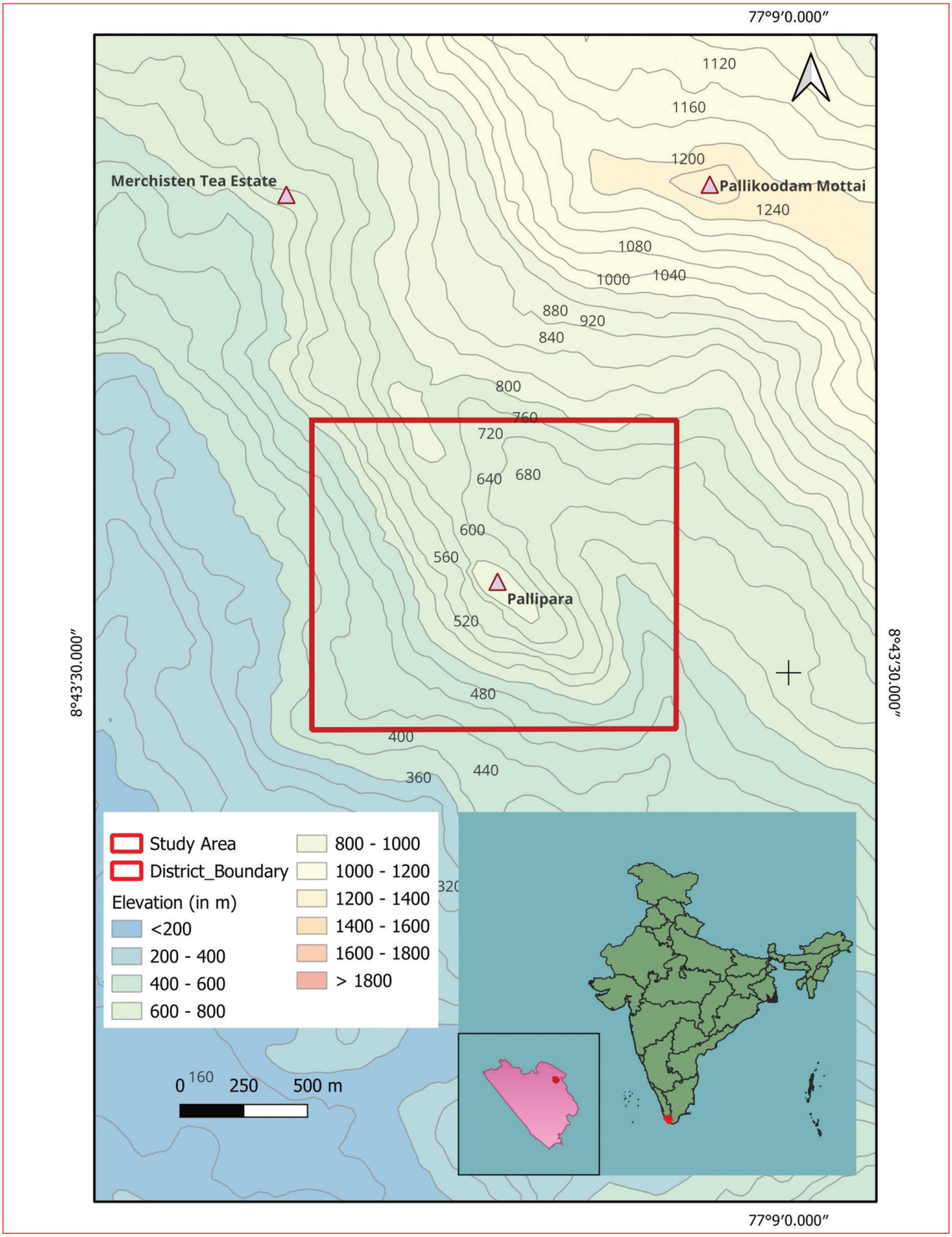


Fig. 2a & 2b. Georeferenced location of Mynall [=Pallippara] Estate on a contemporary map of Thiruvananthapuram district, Kerala.

1,500–2,000 ft more than the documented height of Mynall. Of course, there exist a chance that the bird was collected by Bourdillon or his party at a higher elevation and brought to Mynall, though Blanford, in his originally description, perhaps oblivious of the details, states that two were taken at Mynall and the third from 'Travancore and Tinnevelly boundary' (Blanford 1880). The syntype selected in the type catalogue at NHMUK is the third one, which has details as collected from 'Travancore-Tinnevelly boundary, 4,400', south India, 3 April 1880' (Warren & Harrison 1971). However, by definition, all localities of specimens used for the type description, unless explicitly stated, should be considered type locality. Hence, Mynall is also its type locality. It is also unclear why Blanford mentioned all three syntypes to have the same altitude as 4,000 feet, when one clearly is taken at a location 400 feet higher.

Though unlikely, there is also a modest chance that Ashambu Laughingthrush used to occur at a slightly lower elevation, closer to the altitude of Pallipara given by Bourdillon. However, other reasons are much stronger.

Geography

There is some conflict in the exact geographical location of Mynall. As per Ali (1984):11, quoting A. J. Moore of Merchiston Estate, Mynall or Pallipara estate was near Ponmudi in southern Travancore. However, Bourdillon's documentation of Pallipara hill is near Chemmunji Peak, described as a 'rounded hill'. Both are along the Vamanapuram River but Bourdillon's location is further upstream, within the borders or close to Peppara Wildlife Sanctuary. To add to it, there is a present-day lesser-known uninhabited location by name Pallipara, an elongated hill, located near Ponmudi and south of Merchiston Estate in the Kallar Forest Section, Palode Forest Range, Thiruvananthapuram Forest Division. I discussed this with forest officers in Palode Forest Range and confirmed that they still use this name. Villagers near Merchiston Estate also knows this area as a natural forest that was once a tea estate decades back. A recent floristic study has visited this location and mapped this elongated hill which has a peak altitude of 820m [=2,700 ft] with rocky exposures ending in a woodland in all sides at about 600m [=2,000 ft] (Decruse & Rajendraprasad 2020:66). This hill corresponds to Kavadiar Mala (8.729°N, 77.139°E) on the Survey of India Toposheet.

Bourdillon's description of Pallipara hill is in conflict with the present-day location in terms of geographic positioning as well as the altitude range. However, the present-day location of Pallipara matches more with the location described by Salim Ali and A. J. Moore. Moore, in 1930s, must have been well-versed about an estate that existed in the landscape a couple of decades back. The possibility of two places with the same name within a constrained geography is feeble, but one is a hill while the other is an estate, and hence not impossible. However, any conclusions drawn might not be definitive, as we are integrating secondary sources from different era.

With rapid socio-economic shift during early 20th century, Mynall must have quickly lost its importance. As geographical coordinates were not mentioned in this early time documentation, locating this site has been a problem for all natural history workers. The estate may have been forced to shut down as plantation crops proved to be economically nonviable. Secondary forest must have overgrown the area and gradually Mynall must have been pushed into obscurity. Later the Forest Department of Kerala must have annexed this land and permission to access made limited. While contemporary estates like Brimore and Bonacaud still retain some evidence of built-up areas or remaining structures, the absence or obscurity of physical evidence for Mynall has necessitated our reliance on secondary sources like publications and correspondence to determine its location.

Considering the range of species collected and described from Mynall, it seems prudent to fix the location of Mynall to the present day Pallipara near Ponmudi as this is the best match in terms of geography and altitude. Hence, I fix the location of Mynall to be between 8.723°N and 8.734°N latitude and 77.133°E and 77.146°E longitude (Fig. 1). The only significant anomaly is the type locality of Ashambu Laughingthrush which certainly must have been procured from higher-up the range, contrary to Blanford (1880), and is closer to the present-day label (4,000 ft = 1,220m) on the cotype at ZSI (Fig. 2). Most studies on sky island birds of Ashambu hills now happen at Pandipath in Peppara Wildlife Sanctuary, not far from Chemmunji peak, which is where these type specimens must have also originated. Hence, I propose to restrict the type locality of Ashambu Laughingthrush to 'Travancore-Tinnevelly boundary [=state border of Kerala and Tamil Nadu in Peppara Wildlife Sanctuary, southern Kerala]' and remove Mynall from the same. While the primary objective of this note was to geo-reference the site, very few sites in India have a natural history legacy that is comparable to Mynall. Hence, studies could be undertaken to compare the present faunistic wealth with the documentation in the late 19th century.

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A Menetries's Warbler *Curruca mystacea* from Hanley, Ladakh: An addition to the Indian avifauna

On 05 July 2025, I was birding in the Khaldo Bagh Plantations in Hanley village (32.773°N, 78.984°E), eastern Ladakh, when a medium-sized moth caught my attention as it flew just a meter ahead of me. As I followed the moth in the hope of photographing it, I noticed a sparrow-sized bird perched in front of me in the *Salix* tree. While looking through the binoculars, the jizz was that of a *Curruca* species. As I was unsure of the identification, I took some photographs **[179, 180]** which revealed many characteristics not seen in any *Curruca* sp. recorded in Ladakh (Gyalpo 2025). Photographs showed the bird with a reddish orbital eye ring, pale iris, white moustachial stripe, and orangish throat becoming pale towards the belly. The forehead, crown and ear-coverts blackish, grading into pale grey of upperparts; tertials dark grey with broad, ill-defined pale grey fringes. Pale legs and brick-red orbital ring separate from invariably dark-legged Lesser Whitethroat *C. curruca*. Smaller size and daintier shape, shorter tail, lack of rufous wing panel and presence of a brick-red orbital ring separated it from Greater Whitethroat *C. communis* (Shirihai & Svensson 2018). The images were forwarded to eBird India Editors group where the bird was suspected to be either an Eastern Subalpine Warbler *C. cantillans* or a Menetries's Warbler *C. mystacea.*

179. Menetries's Warbler showing black hood, crown and ear coverts with reddish orbital ring, pale iris, white moustachial stripe and paler legs on 05 July 2025.

180. Menetries's Warbler showing white moustachial stripe, orangish throat grading paler towards belly on 05 July 2025.

Both photos: Padma Gyalpo

The major pitfall is the similar looking Eastern Subalpine Warbler, from which it differs in having pale fringes of tertials distinctly less sharply demarcated, more contrastingly blackish tail and presence of prominent blackish hood (Aymí & Gargallo 2021). Blackish hood was visible in all photographs **[179, 180]**. The identification was narrowed down to a breeding plumage of a male Menetries's Warbler *turcmenica* subspecies based on intermediate plumage compared to the darkest *mystacea* and palest *rubescens* and being the easternmost form in the species overall distribution range. Menetries's Warbler is a Middle Eastern and Central Asian breeding endemic whose subspecies-specific migratory ranges are poorly understood and has a few cases of vagrancies outside the known range.

The presence of the warbler has been reported multiple times by different observers in the same plantation area till 05 September 2025. It is safe to conclude that all of the records are of the same individual based on the photographic evidence in eBird. By 16 August 2025, the otherwise prominent black hood has partially turned pale brown alongside mantle with nape and uppertail coverts still remaining greyish, and the orangish throat also slightly becoming dull **[181]**. By 28 August, its upperparts from the hood till the upper tail-coverts is completely uniform pale brownish with only a slight hint of grey. The tertial edges have also turned brownish while retaining the dark centers and the white moustachial stripe becoming inconspicuous to the otherwise orangish throat patch **[182]**. However, the black tail is retained. Compared to spring, grey of upperparts tinged pale sandy-brown, and blackish crown duller and less clearly demarcated; pale salmon-pink throat and breast generally less intense, being tipped whitish (Shirihai & Svensson 2018) can be observed in autumn birds.

181. Menetries's Warbler showing pale brown hood, mantle, nape and duller orangish throat on 16 August 2025.

Both photos: Padma Gyalpo

182. Menetries's Warbler showing uniform pale-brown upperparts with dark centers to brownish tertials on 28 August 2025.

The occurrence of this bird in Ladakh is the south-easternmost record for the species. The first subcontinental record was reported from the Surkhab Valley, Pakistan, by T. J. Roberts in March 1974 (Roberts 1975), and subsequently he found several pairs breeding in west-central Baluchistan (Roberts 1980). More recently, it was reported by M. Akram Awan from Chaghi District, Baluchistan, where the species is considered localized (Azan Karam, pers. comm. September 2025). The closest report of Menetries's Warbler in eBird is from Tajikistan (Gregory 2025) but the nearest published record is from Kotla Habib [=Kotla Habeeb], Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan on 21 September 1993 (Kylänpää 200), which would be the closest (*c.*800km) to Ladakh. The bird is not recorded in the latest *India Checklist* (Praveen & Jayapal 2025), hence marking this record from Hanley region in Ladakh as the first for India.

I would like to thank Mr. Azan Karam for his valuable comments and information regarding the presence for Menetries's Warbler from Baluchistan.

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The Banded Bay Cuckoo *Cacomantis sonneratii* at Bhoj Nagar, Solan District, Himachal Pradesh, India, and its status in the state

On 16 February 2025, during the Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) of 2025, VS, MK, SN & SN were birding in the Chakki Mod area in Solan District, Himachal Pradesh, India. Concurrently, another event, the annual dawn-to-dusk Chandigarh Bird Race, was also in progress. Moving along the road from Chakki Mod to Bhojnagar, a good number of bird species were observed, especially near Bhojnagar (30.836°N, 77.062°E; 1,385 m asl), where a garbage dump and a nearby pine tree usually attract 5–7 species. At 1130 h, a bird was seen flying and then perched on a tree. It certainly felt like a cuckoo, but could not be identified to the species level immediately. The bird also did not vocalize, so identification by sound was not possible. Nevertheless, some photographs were taken, and it was later identified as a Banded Bay Cuckoo *Cacomantis sonneratii* **[183, 184]**, based on the

183. Banded Bay Cuckoo showing the barred whitish underparts, cheeks and supercilium at Bhoj Nagar, Solan District, Himachal Pradesh.

184. Banded Bay Cuckoo showing barred rufous-brown back and crown at Bhoj Nagar, Solan District, Himachal Pradesh.

Both photos: Vikas Sharma

descriptions and illustrations by Grimmett et al. (2011) and Erritzøe et al. (2012). The following diagnostic characteristics were noted: barred rufous-brown back and crown, barred whitish supercilium, dark eye-stripe, barred whitish cheeks, barred whitish underparts, and white-tipped tail.

This unexpected sighting made our day and prompted us to investigate the status of this bird in Himachal Pradesh, as we had hardly heard about it being seen in the state, except for a couple of photos on social media. Banded Bay Cuckoo is a resident in Southeast Asia west of Wallace's line (Erritzøe et al. 2012; Payne & Hansasuta 2024). In India, the Banded Bay Cuckoo is resident across the Himalayan foothills from Uttarakhand to the Eastern Himalaya, throughout northeastern India, and across much of Peninsular India; however, part of the northern population is believed to migrate south to the peninsula during winter (Erritzøe et al. 2012; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). To the west of Uttarakhand, the distribution map in Grimmett et al. (2011) depicts only one record from Himachal Pradesh and shows the status in Jammu & Kashmir with a question mark. Payne & Hansasuta (2024) do not provide any distribution details for India, but their map covers parts of Himachal Pradesh and Jammu & Kashmir. We found only two records from Jammu &

Table 1. Reports of the Banded Bay Cuckoo from Himachal Pradesh

Location	Date & Description	Reference
Shimla [=Simla] Hills (no specific location given)	Between 1908 and 1918, one was observed at an elevation of 5000 ft [=1,500m].	Jones (1919). This is the one referenced in Grimmett et al. (2011). Tim Inskipp confirmed this in litt., email dated 18 February 2025.
Kasauli, District Solan	Undated. Seen a few times, hence, included by Bill Harvey & Bikram Grewal in a 2003 post to the Delhibird mailing list under the subject, 'Birds of Kasauli'. Now not traceable.	Bikram Grewal, in litt., e-mail dated 18 February 2025
Himachal Pradesh Agricultural University, Palampur	Recorded during a study from January 2019 to April 2020. However, no evidence is provided.	Kottawa-Arachchi et al. (2022)
Bhagsunag Waterfall Pathway, District Kangra	31 Oct 2019, no photo.	Mishra (2019)
Chakki Mod, District Solan	2021, one bird photographed.	Garry Bhatti pers. comm. 19 February 2025
Chakki Mod, District Solan	30 January 2022, one bird photographed.	Cheema et al. (2022)
Chakki Mod-Bhojnagar Road, District Solan	28 February 2022, one bird photographed.	Bhatti (2022)
Simbalbara National Park, District Sirmaur	12 May 2022, one bird photographed.	Chaudhary (2022)
Chakki Mod, District Solan	21 December 2023, one bird photographed.	Bhatti (2023)
Chakki Mod, District Solan	November 2024, one bird photographed.	Bhatti (2024)

Kashmir (Ward 1906; Osmaston 1927), and the species has not been reported again for decades (Kichloo et al. 2024). However, from Himachal Pradesh, we have been able to find multiple records from different sources, especially since 2019 (Table 1).

It would be erroneous to infer any pattern in the movement as we have only a limited number of records. Therefore, based on the current knowledge about the Banded Bay Cuckoo as a resident bird in India, we can safely say that this species is a resident of, at least, southern Himachal Pradesh, with records from both winter and summer seasons, although it is uncommon. Records from other parts of the state are largely unconfirmed. Multiple records from the Chakki Mod area in Solan District are probably due to the high birding activity there, as its proximity to Chandigarh makes it convenient to visit. Birdwatchers visiting other locations in the Shivalik belt, from Sirmaur District through Kangra District, should remain alert to the possible presence of this species.

We thank Tim Inskipp and Bikram Grewal for their inputs on the presence of the Banded Bay Cuckoo in Himachal Pradesh.

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Addition of the Black-faced Bunting *Emberiza spodocephala* to the avifauna of Punjab, India

In the Indian subcontinent, the Black-faced Bunting *Emberiza spodocephala* is known to winter in north-western Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Assam and the adjoining north-eastern states of India, east-central Bangladesh, and also terai and duars west to central Nepal; from plains to *c.*1000 m; commonly in bushy habitats, sugarcane fields, gardens, rice fields, and areas near water bodies (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012; Praveen 2025).

On 23 March 2025, at 0900 h, PSA observed a Black-faced Bunting during a routine bird-watching trip on Garhshankar-Nangal road in hilly agricultural landscape north-east of Garhshankar (31.292°N, 76.265°E), Hoshiarpur District, Punjab, India. It was identified as a non-breeding male by its dark lores, olive grey head and crown, dark chin, brown coverts with pale-tipped wing bars, pale brown upperparts with dark streaks, and some dull rufous streaks on the flanks. The tail was dark brown, featuring white on the outer rectrices **[185]**. The absence of broad, grey-white to buffy-white sub-moustachial stripe ruled out the possibility of female and immature male. Additionally, the bird lacked yellow underparts with dark flank streaks, ruling out an individual in full breeding plumage (Bradshaw 1992).

Paramnoor Singh Antal

185. Black-faced Bunting near Garhshankar, Hoshiarpur District, Punjab.

Although Black-faced Bunting is considered a relatively short-distance migrant, it is known to exhibit vagrancy. The species has been recorded in western Europe on multiple occasions and as a vagrant in Xinjiang (western China), Batanes (northernmost Philippines), and as far south as the Taliabu Island in the Sula Archipelago, east of Sulawesi, Indonesia (Kirwan et al. 2022).

In Punjab, there are no previous records of Black-faced Bunting, nor from adjacent states like Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, and Jammu & Kashmir. However, a recent confirmed record exists from Ladakh (Gyalpo 2024) and one single record from Uttar Pradesh (Gokulakrishnan et al. 2024). In Uttarakhand, the species was earlier mentioned as a wintering vagrant to Corbett National Park (Byers et al. 1995), but no supporting details were provided. A subsequent mention by Khati (2004) from the Corbett Tiger Reserve served as the basis for its inclusion in the avifauna of Uttarakhand by Tak & Sati (2010). This, in turn, formed the basis for a location record shown in the distribution map by Grimmett et al. (2011) from Uttarakhand, which was later cited by Mohan & Sondhi (2024), though they list it under the doubtful records. Tim Inskipp (in litt. email dated 23 March 2025), also considered the documentation insufficient and that the species' occurrence in Uttarakhand requires confirmation.

If the unverified Uttarakhand sighting is excluded, the present

observation is the only confirmed documentation of Black-faced Bunting from the region between Nepal and Ladakh and the first record from Punjab, India.

We wish to thank Tim Inskipp and Sanjay Sondhi for providing inputs about occurrence of Black-faced Bunting in Uttarakhand.

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On the breeding of the Indian Thick-knee *Burhinus indicus* in Aravalli Biodiversity Park, Delhi, India

The Indian Thick-knee *Burhinus indicus* is a widely distributed bird species across the Indian subcontinent, typically inhabiting open dry fields, grasslands, thorn forest, scrubby riverbeds, often favouring chalky soil, bare ground or grasslands for breeding (Grimmett et al. 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). It is characterized by its prominent yellow eyes, long yellowish legs, and a stout, slightly upturned yellow and black bill and a cryptic brownish plumage with streaks providing effective camouflage. Existing literature has described key elements of its breeding behaviour such as nest site selection, often in open ground or under sparse cover (Stuart Baker 1935; Ali & Ripley 1987; Sangha 2021), typical clutch sizes and egg morphology (Stuart Baker 1935), and the biparental nature of chick rearing (Ali & Ripley 1987), while Stuart Baker (1935) reported only female incubates. However, despite these contributions, detailed accounts of the full breeding cycle of the Indian Thick-knee, particularly the incubation period, remain conspicuously absent from documented studies. However, the Indian Thick-knee apparently shares several aspects of its breeding behaviour with the Eurasian Thick-knee *B. oedicnemus* (Hume & Kirwan 2020), with which it was once considered conspecific (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). The species is a resident in the Delhi region, found in a variety of open habitats, including semi-arid areas, scrubland, and even within urban limits (Vyas 2019).

We documented the breeding of Indian Thick-knee at Aravalli Biodiversity Park (28.539°–28.573° N, 77.143°–77.165° E), Delhi, a restoration site in a city, *c.*2.8 sq. km in size, situated between urban centres of Vasant Vihar and Vasant Kunj in Delhi. This area was once mined, and its barren landscape was dominated by invasive flora such as *Prosopis juliflora*, *Lantana camara*, and *Leucaena leucocephala*, with some remnant native Aravalli species like *Acacia leucophloea*, *Capparis decidua*, *C. sepiaria*, and *Adhatoda vasica*. In 2004, the Centre for Environmental Management of Degraded Ecosystems (CEMDE), University of Delhi, initiated a significant ecological restoration drive of the area under a collaborative program with the Delhi Development Authority (DDA). Subsequently, more diverse vegetation types, including scrub forest, dry deciduous forest, grassland, and shrubland, were established.

MRK photo-documented the breeding of the Indian Thick-knee. Utmost care was taken to ensure the safety and well-being of the birds, following the *Indian BIRDS* nesting biology guidelines (Barve et al. 2020). All applicable guidelines and ethical considerations for wildlife photography were strictly adhered to throughout the study. Observations and photographs were captured from a safe distance (9–10 m) using binoculars and a telephoto lens, without causing undue disturbance to the nesting birds, their nest, or eggs. Morning and evening times were also avoided as feeding was maximum at these times. Most of the observations took place during 1100–1130 h and 1500–1530 h. The nest location was clearly marked and monitored periodically (every 4–5 days) **[186]**. Nest characteristics, including dimensions and surrounding vegetation within a 5 m radius, were documented, and the dimensions of the nest were estimated visually from a distance of 9–10 m. Observations on parental behaviour, incubation period, hatching, chick development, and post-hatching movements were recorded. The ambient temperature of the area during our study was around 44°C. The exact coordinates of the nest location are not mentioned here.

Mohammad Rizwan Khan

186. Nesting site of Indian Thick-knee at Aravalli Biodiversity Park, Delhi.

The first Indian Thick-knee was observed on 05 May 2024, while its nest was found on 06 May 2024 under an *Acacia leucophloea* tree located in an undisturbed corner of the park **[187]**. The nesting site also included sparse *Carissa spinarum* and *Capparis sepiaria* shrubs. The nest was a scrape on the ground, lined with a thin layer of humus, leaves, dry flowers, and small twigs, after the bird, apparently, cleared *c.*1.5 cm of leaf litter. The nest measured *c.*25–30 cm in length, 15–20 cm in width, and a few centimetres in depth.

Two pale white eggs with irregular dark brown patches, providing effective camouflage against the nest background,

were observed in the nest **[188]**. The eggs were broad at one end and pointed at the other, consistent with descriptions in Ali & Ripley (1987). Even upon approaching the nest to *c.*10m, the bird tends to leave the nest and move 8–12 m away to join its mate or move in the opposite direction, displaying distraction behaviour by sometimes pretending to sit at a different spot. Conversely, when the observer remained still at a distance, the mate would approach and sit on the nest, indicating shared incubation duties by both parents.

187. Incubating eggs by one of the parents.

All Photos: Mohammad Rizwan Khan

188. Two eggs of Indian Thick-knee.

The first chick hatched on 30 May, and the second on 31 May 2024, indicating an incubation period of *c.*25 days, which aligns with the 24–27 days range reported for the Eurasian Thick-knee (Nadeem et al. 2014). The hatchlings were initially underdeveloped with minimal feathering **[189]**. The first chick appeared to develop feathers slightly faster than the second. The bird stayed with the chicks in the nest for the first two days post-hatching before relocating themselves *c.*12 m away under a *Carissa spinarum* plant within the same area. Both parents were observed monitoring the chicks from *c.*4 m. Three days later, the family moved again to the adjacent forest area, *c.*100 m away from the nest site within the park. The family was not monitored after they moved into the forest to avoid disturbing the parenting.

The observed parental care, with both parents participating in incubation and chick-rearing, is a characteristic behaviour of the species. The vegetation surrounding the nesting site, including species like *Flueggea leucopyrus*, *Capparis sepiaria*, *Ziziphus nummularia*, *Carissa spinarum*, *Ehretia laevis*, *Grewia tenax*, *Calotropis procera*, and various herbs and grasses, is relatively similar to its well-documented nesting habitats (Sangha 2021). Incubation period of the Indian Thick-knee has not been reported yet and, unsurprisingly, we found it to be similar to that of the Eurasian Thick-knee.

189. Chicks of Indian Thick-knee.

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An Icterine Warbler *Hippolais icterina* from the Union Territory of Ladakh: An addition to the South Asian avifauna

In the middle of September 2025, I accompanied a small group of birders including Sheela Panwar, Harshil Sharma, Milind Gogte, Jyotsna Gogte and Sunil Unni to explore passage migrants in Ladakh. Rigzin, Nubu and Nawang Gyatso were also accompanying us as guides cum drivers.

On 13 September 2025, we set out for Kakstet (33.767°N, 78.600°E) for our target birds, the Tibetan Partridge *Perdix*

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.

All photos: Rajesh Panwar

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 km^2 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 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.

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.

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A Long-tailed Sibia *Heterophasia picaoides* in the Sumin Reserved Forest, Sikkim, India

The Long-tailed Sibia *Heterophasia picaoides* is a resident of the Eastern Himalaya and the hills of northeastern India and inhabits the broad-leaved evergreen forests in tropical and subtropical zones (Grimmett et al. 2011). In Assam, it has been reported as a common winter migrant to Nameri National Park (Barua et al. 2005). Outside India, it is common in China, Laos, Vietnam, Malaysia, Sumatra, Nepal, and Bhutan (Collar & Robson 2020). Both males and females resemble each other, and they can be easily distinguished from other sibias by their distinctive long, white-tipped, graduated tails, crimson irises, and a white patch on the wings (Collar & Robson 2020).

On 16 January 2025, we were returning home after birdwatching at Sumin Reserve Forest (27.235°N, 88.551°E; 1670 m asl). At 1030 h, we observed a flock of 12 birds with long tails feeding on the nectar of Ghurpis *Leucosceptrum canum* flowers. At first, we ignored them, assuming they were Grey Treepies *Dendrocitta formosae*, but after a few seconds, we realized they seemed different, so we observed them again carefully. Unsure of their identity, we immediately opened the Merlin app and searched for "long tail." The top result was Long-tailed Sibia, and upon comparison, we felt confident in the identification, adding another lifer to our list. A check of its eBird range map indicated the species is sparsely distributed. Since there was no network coverage at the site, we walked downhill for ten minutes to call senior birders for confirmation. While they suggested it might be a different species, we remained convinced it was a Long-tailed Sibia, having already verified the identification on Merlin and matched it with the plates in Grimmett et al. (2011). We then returned to the site, obtained photographs and videos using binoculars and a phone camera, and sent them to Rozen Dhungel and Divyendu Ash. They confirmed the identification. The sighting was subsequently uploaded to eBird (2025) and confirmed as a Long-tailed Sibia by the reviewer. Since our initial images were of low resolution, we informed fellow birders Kanchan Rai and Ranjeet Subba, who later captured high-resolution photographs **[196]**, which were featured in newspapers such as *The Voice of Sikkim* and *The Echo of India*.

Historical records indicate multiple sightings and preserved specimens of the Long-tailed Sibia from Sikkim and the nearby areas of Darjeeling and eastern Nepal, including the three syntypes by Hodgson from Nepal at the Natural History Museum, London (Sharpe 1883:402). Sharpe also listed four more skins from Nepal and three from Darjeeling (Sharpe 1883:402). GBIF (2025a) lists a specimen (CUMV#11915) collected by Frank S. Wright in 1860 from an unspecified location in Sikkim. Stevens (1923) reported observing a large party of Long-tailed Sibias feeding on 'Simul' (*Bombax*) flowers and noted their occurrence beyond Singtam in the Tista Valley at 1,800 m asl during February and March 1920; he later collected a nest and egg (NHMUK#E1925.12.25.6647 in GBIF 2025b) as well as specimens (FMNH #84840) from Sikkim (Field Museum of Natural History 2025). Additionally, five historical specimens from Darjeeling were listed from the Indian

Kanchan Rai

196. Long-tailed Sibia, Sumin Reserved Forest, Sikkim.

Museum (Finn 1901:70). Ali (1962) also mentioned the species for Sikkim. No photographic or any other published records from the state exist after his account. Acharya & Vijayan (2010) likewise contain no record. Consequently, the recent sighting at Sumin after more than six decades represents a significant ornithological record for Sikkim.

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An European Honey-buzzard *Pernis apivorus* in Maharashtra, India

We report the first confirmed sighting of the European Honey-buzzard *Pernis apivorus* (hereinafter, EHBU) in Maharashtra, India. On 06 November 2024, at 0905 h, we observed a large raptor soaring over Vetal Tekdi grasslands, near quarry area (18.527°N, 73.817°E) in Pune District, Maharashtra **[197, 198]**. The bird appeared to be molting feathers from both wings and the tail. It was being mobbed by Black Kites *Milvus migrans*. Photographs were taken from multiple angles. Initially the bird was identified as an Oriental Honey-buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus* (hereinafter, OHBU). However, when photographs were shared on the Pune Birding Community forum, Adesh Shivkar noted that the features suggested EHBU rather than OHBU. On the next day, 07 November 2024, the bird was again seen briefly soaring at the same site at 0710 h. This time again, it was being chased by Black Kites.

Mayur Arole

197. European Honey-buzzard, with clearly visible dark carpel patch and four fingered primaries, photographed on 06 November 2024 at Vetal Tekdi, Pune, Maharashtra.

Aniruddha Gokhale

198. European Honey-buzzard showing a single, prominent dark terminal tail band, photographed on 06 November 2024 at Vetal Tekdi, Pune, Maharashtra.

Based on the identification criteria in Anand et al. (2020), following characteristics were observed in the bird clearly distinguishing it from OHBU and OHBU x EHBU hybrid;

1. **Dark carpal patch:** Prominent and clearly visible on the observed bird, absent in OHBU.
2. **Single dark terminal band on the tail:** Unlike OHBUs, which typically exhibit two or more dark tail bands, the bird had a single, prominent dark terminal band.
3. **Subtle outer bar on secondaries:** The outer bar of the secondaries in the observed bird merged subtly into the coverts before reaching the body, unlike in OHBUs, where the bar extends further toward the body.
4. **Fewer primary fingers:** The bird showed only four primary fingers, whereas OHBUs typically have six.
5. **Eye color:** The bird's eye appeared yellow, in contrast to the red eyes typically seen in OHBUs.

As there are no features that would suggest an OHBU, we can rule out the possibility of an OHBU x EHBU hybrid. The identification was further confirmed through expert consultation, including discussions with Nirav Bhat, who also noted these distinguishing features. The species was sighted again on 14 February 2025 at the same location (Rane 2025).

These observations represent the first documented record of the EHBU in Maharashtra. There is one previous record of a hybrid OHBU x EHBU individual photographed from Sanjay Gandhi National Park, Mumbai in 2022 (Desai 2022). These sightings add to the growing knowledge of the distribution of the EHBU in India and is of considerable interest to birders and ornithologists in the region.

We thank Adesh Shivkar, Nirav Bhat and the Pune Birding Community forum for helping with understanding the differences and guiding us towards correct identification of the bird

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A Pied Crow *Corvus albus* at Pulicat Lake, India: Could ship-assistance be the reason for all records from India?

Pulicat Lake is the second largest brackish water lagoon in India, covering *c.*620 sq. km. It has numerous islands, and is fed by three major rivers, making it a vital ecosystem for diverse flora and fauna (Francis & Aram 2016). The lake spans across two districts, Nellore in Andhra Pradesh and Tiruvallur in Tamil Nadu. In this note, we report a sighting of the Pied Crow *Corvus albus* from the Tamil Nadu sector of Pulicat Lake, a species native to Sub-Saharan Africa and not previously recorded from this region.

On 22 November 2024, at around 1000 h, we (BSN, SDR, & RS) saw a Pied Crow in the Annamalaichery area (13.457°N, 80.264°E) of Pulicat Lake, Tamil Nadu. The weather was clear and sunny. The bird was initially observed through a Nikon D5600 camera with a 70-300 mm lens. It was seen perching

alongside a House Crow *C. splendens*, both appearing to feed on a piece of meat placed on wooden poles typically used by local fishermen for laying out fishing nets **[199]**. The larger crow, presumed to be the Pied Crow, eventually took possession of the meat after a brief tussle with the House Crow **[200, 201]**. It flew to a nearby wooden stand used for hanging fishing nets, where it continued feeding and later preening **[202]**. After a few minutes, it flew towards nearby human habitation and was not seen again.

199. Pied Crow perched beside a House Crow.

200. Pied Crow tussling mid-air with a House Crow over a piece of meat.

201. Pied Crow in possession of the piece of meat after the tussle

All photos: Basu SS Nair

202. Pied Crow preening its feathers after feeding

The bird's striking black-and-white plumage drew our attention. The head, neck, and upper chest were black with a glossy blue and purple sheen, contrasting sharply with a distinct white collar on the upper mantle. This white extended across the breast and down the sides of the body. The rest of the upperparts and underparts were dull black with less gloss **[203, 204]**. The bill and legs were black, and no vocalisations were recorded during the sighting.

203. Lateral view highlighting the sharp white collar and contrasting black plumage.

All photos: Basu SS Nair

204. The bird perched on a wooden pole used by fishermen for drying nets, exhibiting its distinctive white breast

The bird in question was identified as a Pied Crow based on its distinctive plumage, size, and overall structure. While the identification appears clear from both direct observations and photographic evidence, it is important to consider other possibilities, such as hybrid or colour aberrant corvids.

The individual appeared noticeably larger than the House Crow observed nearby, with a more robust build. Its proportions, including a moderately graduated tail, upright posture, and less domed head, further supported the identification. In contrast to the Large-billed Crow *C. macrorhynchos*, this bird lacked the heavy arched bill and uniformly black plumage (Ali & Ripley 1987). The species identification was confirmed by Dr. Rajah Jayapal via email (Rajah Jayapal, *in litt.,* e-mail dated 14 April 2025) as well as in person.

Colour aberrations such as leucism and progressive greying have been reported in native crows, but these usually result in irregular feathering, reduced social acceptance, or abnormal behaviour (van Grouw 2021; Amar-Singh et al. 2023). No such features were observed in this bird. Its healthy behaviour, lack of asymmetry, and natural looking plumage suggest this individual was not a colour aberrant but a genuinely wild bird. These aspects collectively support the identification of the bird as a Pied Crow; a species not previously recorded from this region.

The Pied Crow is widely distributed across Sub-Saharan Africa, ranging from Senegal and Sudan in the north to South Africa and Madagascar in the south. It inhabits a wide variety of open habitats, including savannahs, farmlands, urban areas, and coastal zones, often in close association with human settlements (Madge et al. 2009). While primarily an African species, the Pied Crow has shown occasional tendencies toward range expansion. In the Middle East, scattered records exist from Yemen and southern Saudi Arabia. Additionally, eBird reports from Oman, UAE, Kuwait, and Iran classify the species as an escapee. There are records from Europe on eBird (eBird 2025). Isolated records have also emerged from South America, particularly along the Brazilian coast (Silva & Olmos 2007; Lima & Kamada 2009), though no breeding population has been established. In South Asia, it was first reported from Rajasthan (Saikia & Goswami 2017) and was initially classified as of 'unknown origin'. It was later accepted for the India checklist with possible reasons for dispersal being ship assistance (Praveen et al. 2019). In 2020, another Pied Crow was photographed in Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, with the image uploaded to eBird (Joshi 2020); ***c.*** 575 km from the current record. However, the Visakhapatnam record is currently marked as 'Provisional' on eBird, and no formal publication has followed yet.

The present sighting from Pulicat Lake, Tamil Nadu, therefore, adds to a small but growing number of observations suggesting sporadic and possibly increasing incursions into India's east coast. Whether these are isolated vagrants, ship-assisted birds or indicative of a larger dispersal trend remains uncertain, warranting further attention. While natural vagrancy cannot be ruled out, such an unusual occurrence outside its known range raises several questions regarding origin, mode of arrival, and the potential for naturalization. Given the proximity to coastal shipping routes and major ports at Chennai, Ennore, and Kattupalli, as well as Visakhapatnam, it is plausible that the individuals recorded along the eastern coast of India could have arrived with maritime assistance, similar to the suggested reason for the Jodhpur record (Saikia & Goswami 2017; Praveen et al. 2019).

An alternative possibility is escape from captivity. Pied Crows are held in several European zoos and private collections (Saikia & Goswami 2017), and the species is occasionally traded as a pet. However, there are no verified records of this species being kept in Indian zoos or private collections (Central Zoo Authority 2024–2025). The individual at Pulicat showed no signs of feather wear or injury typical of captive birds, and its behaviour remained wary and similar to a wild bird. These factors make a recent escape from captivity unlikely.

Globally, the Pied Crow has demonstrated notable adaptability and potential for range expansion, with increases in abundance supported by road and powerline infrastructure (Cunningham et al. 2016; Londei 2020). While breeding populations remain unconfirmed outside its native African range, isolated records from regions such as the Brazilian coast have flagged the species as a potential invasive species (Adelino et al. 2017). These observations highlight the Pied Crow's ability to persist in human-modified landscapes and the need for monitoring isolated vagrancy events like this. Continued monitoring in the Pulicat region and surrounding coastal areas may reveal whether this sighting represents an isolated event or is a part of a recurring pattern of vagrancy.

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A Yellow-rumped Flycatcher *Ficedula zanthopygia* from Goa, India

Although Goa is one of India's smaller states, it supports an impressive avifaunal diversity of 489 species (Baidya & Bhagat 2024). With birdwatching gaining popularity both as a hobby among local enthusiasts and as a reason for birders across the country to visit Goa, the number of reported sightings has naturally increased as more observers take to the field. Over the past five years (2019–2024), 18 new species records have been documented in the state (Baidya & Bhagat 2019 2025). To this growing list, we now add the Yellow-rumped Flycatcher *Ficedula zanthopygia*.

The Yellow-rumped or Korean Flycatcher is a small to medium-sized flycatcher that breeds across southeastern Russia, eastern Mongolia, the Korean Peninsula, and eastern China. They winter in the Malay Peninsula, Sumatra, and Java (Clement & de Juana 2020). It is considered a vagrant in India by Grimmett et. al (2011). Since the first record in 1989 from Central India, there have been ***c.***20 records from various parts of the country, with most sightings occurring in southern India and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, and one from eastern India (eBird 2025).

On 13 November 2024 at 0945 h, while on a birdwatching tour near the Mahadev Temple in Tambdi-Surla on the outskirts of the Bhagwan Mahaveer Wildlife Sanctuary, PR heard a call that resembled the *Ficedula* flycatcher. The individual, showing a prominent yellow rump and a distinct white wing patch, was sighted and photographed **[205, 206]**. Its overall brown upperparts, whitish underparts, yellow rump, and wing patch confirmed the identification as a female Yellow-rumped Flycatcher. The bird's relatively large size, along with its diagnostic markings, particularly the yellow rump, clearly distinguished it from similar species, such as the Red-breasted Flycatcher *F. parva* and the Taiga Flycatcher *F. albicilla*. The species was observed intermittently at the same location after our initial sighting, with the most recent sighting recorded on 13 January 2025. The forest type where the individual occurred was a mix of moist-deciduous and semi-evergreen. The individual remained in the middle and upper canopy, fleeting between branches. It was not in the company of any other bird during the first sighting, but KT observed it getting mobbed by other birds such as Tickell's Blue Flycatcher *Cyornis tickelliae*, Yellow-browed Bulbul *Acritillas indica*, and Black-naped Monarch *Hypothymis azurea* during subsequent visits. This is an addition to the checklist of Goa, taking the tally to 490 species.

205. Female Yellow-rumped Flycatcher, Goa.

Both photos: Parag Rangnekar

206. Female Yellow-rumped Flycatcher, Goa.

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Autumn passage migration of falcons in West Champaran District, Bihar, India

Several falcons migrate long distances between Eurasia and Africa, crossing the Indian subcontinent during spring and autumn passage. Among them, Amur Falcon *Falco amurensis* travels a massive distance between its breeding grounds in north-eastern Asia and wintering range in southern Africa (Bildstein 2006), while the Lesser Kestrel *F. naumanni* breeds in Europe, Central Asia, China and Mongolia, and winters in central and southern Africa (BirdLife International 2021). The Eurasian Hobby *F. subbuteo* breeds widely across Eurasia, including parts of the Himalaya, from Kashmir to at least Nepal and probably Bhutan and winters in Africa and Southeast Asia (Naoroji 2006). All these three falcons have similar diet preferences and also associate with each other during their passage migration forming communal roosts (Naoroji 2006). Although all are known to occur as passage migrants in India, records from Bihar remain few. Here, I summarise observations of these falcons from West Champaran District, Bihar, spanning 2016–2024.

The first record in the present series was on 26 October 2016 at 1100 h, when four male Lesser Kestrels were observed and photographed at Harinagar Sugar Mill Colony (27.152°N, 84.329°E), the place where I live, in Ramnagar Town in West Champaran. Soon after, on 01 November 2016 at 0700 h, a flock of 11 Amur Falcons, including three males, six females, and two juveniles was recorded near Gobardhana village (27.311°N, 84.315°E), perched on low electrical wires. The next year, on 16 October 2017, a small mixed flock of five Lesser Kestrels and two female Amur Falcons was observed at Harinagar Sugar Mill Colony, Ramnagar Town. The birds came in late morning, circling overhead and catching insects all day till 1620 h. The

birds remained there for eight days after which some of them were observed flying towards west on the last day. A gap in observations occurred until 2020, when on 06 November 2020, seven Amur Falcons and a male Lesser Kestrel were again seen at Harinagar. On 12 November 2020, I followed their direction of movement towards Gobardhana range in search of probable roosting site, when at 1000 h, more than 100 Amur Falcons and some Eurasian Hobbies were observed flying and catching insects above Gobardhana village, near the Gobardhana range of Valmiki Tiger Reserve.

From 2021 onwards, the sightings were regular and of larger congregations. On 03 November 2021, a mixed flock of Amur Falcons and Eurasian Hobbies was observed near Gobardhana Village. Choudhury (2016) had observed over 10,000 Amur Falcons at Bholapur Kharhat (27.200°N, 84.226°E). I went to the exact location on 06 November 2021 morning and was amazed to find more than 500 individuals of Amur Falcons roosting on high tension transmission lines. Six scattered flocks of 100–200 individuals were also observed in the area perched on low electrical wires and trees like Sheesham *Dalbergia sisso* and Bael *Aegle marmelos* while others were on the ground in the wet agricultural fields. Again, on 08 November 2021 evening, the number of Amur Falcons observed was more (almost three times more) than on the previous visit. In November 2022, daily monitoring at Bholapur Kharhat revealed a smaller number of Amur Falcons, with Lesser Kestrels and Eurasian Hobbies also present in low numbers. However, in October 2023, *c.*4,000–5,000 Amur Falcons were noted at the same site, alongside *c.*100 Lesser Kestrels and more than nine Eurasian Hobbies. The most recent records in 2024 again confirmed large gatherings, with peak counts of 4,000–5,000 Amur Falcons and smaller numbers of the other two species **[207–209]** (Tables 1–3).

207. A Lesser Kestrel along with an Amur Falcon at Bholapur Kharhat, West Champaran District, Bihar.

All photos: Abhishek Sharma

208. A flock of Amur Falcons along with small number of Eurasian Hobbies perched on high-tension powerlines at Bholapur Kharhat, West Champaran District, Bihar.

Abhishek Sharma

209. A Eurasian Hobby in flight at Harinagar, Bihar on 24 October 2023.

A detailed year-wise account of all observations for the three species is presented in Tables 1–3.

Table 1. Year-wise records of Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni* during autumn passage migration in West Champaran District, Bihar (2016–2024)

Date	Location	Number of Individuals observed
26 October 2016	Harinagar (27.152°N, 84.329°E)	4
16 October 2017	Harinagar (27.152°N, 84.329°E)	5 (One Adult male, others juvenile)
06 November 2020	Harinagar (27.152°N, 84.329°E)	1
28 October 2021	Harinagar (27.152°N, 84.329°E)	2
27 October 2022	Harinagar (27.152°N, 84.329°E)	1
21 October 2023	Harinagar (27.152°N, 84.329°E)	15 (Two adult male, rest females / juvenile)
24 October 2023	Harinagar (27.152°N, 84.329°E)	>50
26 October 2023	Bholapur Kharhat (27.200°N,84.226°E)	>100
07 November 2023	Bholapur Kharhat (27.200°N,84.226°E)	>20
25 October 2024	Bholapur Kharhat (27.200°N,84.226°E)	3 (juvenile birds)
25 October 2024	Harinagar (27.152°N, 84.329°E)	3
30 October 2024	Bholapur Kharhat (27.200°N,84.226°E)	3 (juvenile birds)

Table 2. Year-wise records of Amur Falcon *Falco amurensis* during autumn passage migration in West Champaran District, Bihar (2016–2024)

Date	Location	Number of Individuals observed
01 November 2016	Gobardhana village (27.311°N, 84.315°E)	11 (Three Male, six females, and two juveniles)
16 October 2017	Harinagar (27.152°N, 84.329°E)	2
06 November 2020	Harinagar (27.152°N, 84.329°E)	7 (Two males, rest females / juveniles)
12 November 2020	Gobardhana village (27.311°N, 84.315°E)	>100
28 October 2021	Harinagar (27.152°N, 84.329°E)	2 (one male, one female)
03 November 2021	Gobardhana village (27.311°N, 84.315°E)	>100
03 November 2021	Sarhatwa village (27.213°N, 84.328°E,)	20
06 November 2021	Bholapur Kharhat (27.200°N,84.226°E)	>10,000
17 October 2022	Bholapur Kharhat (27.200°N,84.226°E)	16
21 October–2 November 2022	Bholapur Kharhat (27.200°N,84.226°E)	2500–3000 (aggregated)
21 November 2022	Bholapur Kharhat (27.200°N,84.226°E)	17

15 October 2023	Harinagar (27.152°N, 84.329°E)	20
17 October–22 November 2023	Bholapur Kharhat (27.200°N,84.226°E)	4000–5000 (aggregated)
12 October 2024	Gobardhana village (27.311°N, 84.315°E)	4 (One adult male, rest females)
17 October 2024	Bholapur Kharhat (27.200°N,84.226°E)	>200
23–30 October 2024	Bholapur Kharhat (27.200°N,84.226°E)	4000–5000 (aggregated)
24 November 2024	Bholapur Kharhat (27.200°N,84.226°E)	28

Table 3. Year-wise records of Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo* during autumn passage migration in West Champaran District, Bihar (2020–2024)

Date	Location	Number of Individuals observed
12 November 2020	Gobardhana village (27.311°N, 84.315°E)	>8
03 November 2021	Gobardhana village (27.311°N, 84.315°E)	7
29 October 2022	Harinagar (27.152°N, 84.329°E)	2 (juvenile birds)
19 October 2023	Harinagar (27.152°N, 84.329°E)	2 (juvenile birds)
24 October 2023	Harinagar (27.152°N, 84.329°E)	2 (juvenile birds)
05 November 2023	Gobardhana village (27.311°N, 84.315°E)	1 (juvenile birds)
07 November 2023	Bholapur Kharhat (27.200°N,84.226°E)	>9
12 October 2024	Gobardhana village (27.311°N, 84.315°E)	6

Across years, roosting behaviour was consistent; falcons assembled on powerlines, trees, and agricultural fields in the evenings, departing between 0900 and 0945 h the next morning, earlier on windy days. Vocalizations at communal roosts were prominent. Lesser Kestrels were most often seen in small flocks, sometimes within Amur Falcon groups, while Eurasian Hobbies were generally fewer, but occasionally associated with larger congregations.

The Lesser Kestrel is currently considered monotypic. However, Corso (2016) described notable plumage variation between western *F n naumanni* and eastern populations as Chinese Lesser Kestrel *F n 'pekinensis'*, with the latter showing more saturated coloration and grey on the upper wing extending to the scapulars. Between 2016 and 2024, the Lesser Kestrels I observed and photographed, consistently exhibited features matching those of the eastern population **[210, 211]**. I shared several photographs with Andrea Corso (in litt. email dated November 2023 and September 2025) who confirmed the birds as 'wonderful *pekinensis*' corresponding to the eastern population.

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210. Two Chinese Lesser Kestrels *F n 'pekinensis'* from Bholapur Kharhat, West Champaran District, Bihar showing saturated grey on the upper wings extending to the scapulars.

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211. A Chinese Lesser Kestrel *F n 'pekinensis'* in flight from Bholapur Kharhat, West Champaran District, Bihar showing grey extending to scapulars.

These observations confirm that the Ramnagar–Gobardhana–Bholapur Kharhat landscape in West Champaran District, Bihar serves as a regular passage area for all three falcon species during autumn migration. The repeated occurrence of large numbers, especially in recent years, highlights the significance of this part of north Bihar as a migration stopover. Together with comparable records from adjoining Nepal (Budhathoki 2024; Chaudhary 2024), the observations suggest that the Bihar–Nepal Terai landscape forms part of an important migration corridor for these long-distance migrants.

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Observations of the Eurasian Bittern *Botaurus stellaris* from Odisha

The Eurasian Bitten *Botaurus stellaris* is an uncommon winter visitor across northern India, and it is known to straggle across the rest of India, where it inhabits wetlands with dense reed-beds, especially *Typha* (Ali & Ripley 2001; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). Its status is considered scarce to rare (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). While some records exist from the western

part of the Indian peninsula (Kerala, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Goa, Gujarat), records from states on the eastern coast, such as West Bengal, Odisha, and Andhra Pradesh, are very few. Most of the records south of Gujarat are restricted to *c.*200 km from the coastline, barring records from Amravati that were *c.*550 m from the western coastline (Gupta 2015; Giri 2018). This species has occasionally been reported in West Bengal, with records on eBird from Chatta Kalikapur, South 24 Paraganas (Pramanik 2020), Digene Beach, Purba Medinipur (Das 2023; Chowdhury 2024), Khidirpur, Dakshin Dinajpur (Pandey 2024), between December and February. In Odisha, it has been recorded from Mangalajodi wetlands (Behura 2016; Sahu 2016) and near North Odisha University in Takatpur, Baripada (Lahkar 2010). A photograph by Indranil Sengupta, taken on 28 January 2012, also exists from Mangalajodi (Megha 2016).

We report two Eurasian Bittern records from two separate locations within Odisha in January 2025. At Bhatrajore Reservoir, Kalahandi (19.847°N, 83.002°E), the species was first recorded and photographed **[212]** by PM on 06 January 2025 (Mangaraj 2025). The bird was initially noticed while foraging in waterlogged fields, where it flushed on close approach by the observer. It was seen again on 17 January 2025 by SM in similar circumstances (Mohanta 2025), and once more on 20 January 2025 by AM, who observed the bird flying slowly and gracefully above the waterbody, resembling a Purple Heron in flight (Mishra 2025). Despite subsequent visits to the site in January and February, the bird was not relocated, suggesting that it had moved on. All observations at this location occurred between 0800 and 1000 hrs. Given the repeated sightings over a span of about 15 days, it is likely that Bhatrajore served as a temporary stopover during migration rather than a wintering site.

Anurag Mishra

212. Eurasian Bittern from Bhatrajore, Kalahandi, Odisha.

In addition, RM documented the species at Gahirmatha (20.485°N, 86.736°E) on 18 January 2025 at 1100 hrs, where it was seen in an abandoned prawn *gherry* (farm). Photographs **[213]** obtained during this encounter confirm the identification beyond doubt. Notably, the record from Kalahandi lies *c.*200 km inland from the eastern coast of India, contrasting with previous records from coastal and brackish-water habitats, such as Mangalajodi in 2016 and Gahirmatha in 2025. This makes the Bhatrajore observation particularly significant.

Bhatrajore Reservoir covers an area of 1.22 sq km at the center of the Kalahandi district. The reservoir margins support dense growth of *Ipomoea* and *Typha* reeds, while adjoining cultivated fields provide additional wetland habitat. The surrounding Ghana Reserve Forest contributes to a high diversity of birdlife, with

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213. Eurasian Bittern from Gahirmatha, Odisha.

nearly 130 species documented from the area across seasons (unpublished data). The report of the Eurasian Bittern from this habitat highlights the potential importance of inland wetlands with suitable microhabitats as stopover sites for rare migratory species, underscoring the need for continued exploration and monitoring to reveal further noteworthy records. The records from Odisha are summarized by chronological order in Table 1, and the four locations are shown in Fig. 1.

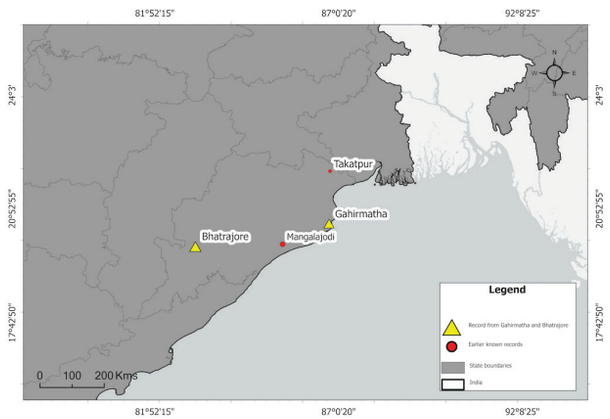

Fig 1. Locations of Eurasian Bittern records from Odisha

Table 1. Records of Eurasian Bittern Botaurus stellaris from Odisha

eBird Checklist	District	Locality	Observer	Date
S209997261	Kalahandi	Bhatrajore	Anurag Mishra	20 January 2025
NA	Kendrapara	Gahirmatha	Rakesh Mohalik	18 January 2025
S209565277	Kalahandi	Bhatrajore	Siddhanta Mohanta	17 January 2025
S208247939	Kalahandi	Bhatrajore	Prabin K Mangaraj	6 January 2025
S28426435	Khordha	Mangalajodi	Deepak Sahu	19 March 2016
S28094895	Khordha	Mangalajodi	Basanta Behura	11 March 2016
NA	Khordha	Mangalajodi	Indraneil Sengupta	28 January 2012
NA	Mayurbhanj	Takatpur	D Lahkar	2010

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A Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina* at Lampokhari Lake, Sikkim, India

On 14 April 2025, between 1410–1450 h, a male Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina* was observed and videographed at Lampokhari (Aritar or Ghati Tso) Lake, Dalapchand village, Pakyong District, Sikkim, India (27.187°N, 88.675°E; 1,500 m asl). During a follow-up visit on 18 April 2025, the bird was again sighted and photographed swimming and foraging alongside domesticated Mallards *Anas platyrhynchos domesticus* **[214]**. It was identified as a male Red-crested Pochard based on rounded rusty-orange head, long bright red bill, black breast, pale flanks, brown upperparts, and a black tail (Grimmett et al. 2011, 2019) **[215]**.

Anup Acharya

214. Red-crested Pochard photographed alongside domesticated Mallards at Lampokhari Lake, Sikkim.

Anup Acharya

215. Male Red-crested Pochard photographed in Lampokhari Lake, Sikkim.

This record appears to be the fourth report of the species from Sikkim. Earlier records include one from Kartok Lake, Gyalshing District on 05 March 2021 (Sherpa 2021), another from Bedang Tso Lake, where a female was observed in November 2022 (Dibyendu Ash, in litt. June 2022) and a third from Lampokhari Lake itself on 15 March 2025 (Dhungel & Dhungel 2025). While the species has been reported from Bhutan, Darjeeling, Kalimpong, and Arunachal Pradesh (eBird 2025a), there were no published reports from Sikkim prior to these records (Grimmett et al. 2019).

The global breeding range of the species lies in the region across Black and Caspian Seas, and from Central Asia to western Mongolia and north-western China (Salvador et al. 2022). Some breeding populations have also been reported in western and eastern Europe, the western Mediterranean Sea islands, north-western Africa, and parts of middle-western Asia (Salvador et al. 2022). In India, it is mainly a winter migrant (Grimmett et al. 2011; Praveen 2025), but records from March–April in the Himalaya suggest that some individuals linger into the breeding season (BirdLife International 2016).

The species is a specialist of large wetlands, feeding primarily on aquatic vegetation, but also on invertebrates, amphibians, and small fish (BirdLife International 2016). At Lampokhari, it was observed foraging in areas with abundant tadpoles. The lake and its surrounding area support over 77 bird species (eBird 2025b) and has potential conservation value, particularly given its religious and ecotourism significance.

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A specimen of Sooty Shearwater *Ardenna grisea* from Porbandar, Gujarat

Pelagic birds, which typically live and forage over open oceans, are sometimes blown toward the Indian coast during the monsoon season due to strong winds. These seabirds can become disoriented or exhausted, leading them to appear unusually close to shore or even inland. From May to July 2025, during the peak of the southwest monsoon, 15 such exhausted or stranded pelagic seabirds were discovered along the Porbandar coast in Gujarat. The birds were found at various locations, including Subhashnagar, Chowpaty, Miyani, Lakadi Bandar, Mokarsagar Wetland, and near the Nirma Factory. The stranded birds included four Wilson's Storm-petrels *Oceanites oceanicus*, along with several Masked Boobies *Sula dactylatra*, unidentified shearwaters, and unidentified tropicbirds. While some of the birds were successfully rehabilitated and released, most did not survive (unpublished data compiled by NT).

One of the unidentified shearwaters, found in a weak state on 28 June 2025, at Porbandar Chowpaty (21.628°N, 69.613°E), was handed over to the Porbandar Bird Sanctuary by a good Samaritan. Local forest guard NM alerted birders NT and PP, who shared the sighting and initiated discussions on regional bird discussion groups on the bird's identification. Unfortunately, the bird died the next day. EM formally requested the Gujarat Forest Department to donate the deceased specimen to the Feather Library, a curated collection of salvaged bird feathers, archived with associated biological and ecological data (Munshi & Everett 2025).

The bird was collected by EM on 07 July 2025. The combination of dark body, moderately long tail, long, slender dark beak and whitish underwing coverts matched only Sooty Shearwater *Ardenna grisea* and Short-tailed Shearwater *A. tenuirostris*. These two species differ primarily in size, bill structure and underwing patterns. However, there is a good amount of individual variation in the underwing pattern in both species. Assessing these minor differences in size, structure and plumage of an isolated fast-moving bird is tricky, especially in unfavourable light. Since the bird was in hand, EM could clean the specimen on 22 July and take photographs of underwing, head and beak **[216]**. EM also recorded the detailed morphometric measurements.

The bird was an immature female. The complete morphometric data are as follows (all lengths in mm): Weight: 429 gm, Wingspan: 1030; Right wing: 467; Body length (bill tip to tail tip): 414; Tail: 108.9; Primary projection: 100.8; Wing to tail: -26.8; Head: 92.5 x 28.4; Bill length: 41.39; Bill width: 13.8; Gape length: 55.8; Gape width: 24.1; Femur: 45.7; Tibiotarsus: 89.3; Tarsometatarsus: 50.5; Digit (i): 4.4; Digit (ii): 45.8; Digit (iii): 53.5; Digit (iv): 50.7; Claw (i): 0; Claw (ii): 2.8; Claw (iii): 8.4; Claw (iv): 6.3.

We used Flood & Fisher (2020) for analysing the plumage features and measurements. Though the total length of the Porbandar bird fell short of the expected range for Sooty Shearwater, other characteristics matched those of a Sooty Shearwater:

- The wing span and beak length fell within the expected ranges for Sooty Shearwater and does not fit Short-tailed Shearwater.
- The bill proportions matched Sooty better than Short-tailed Shearwater, with the nasal tube noticeably shorter than culminicorn and maxillary unguis.
- The underwing showed a "butter knife" shaped white patch with prominent white median and lesser primary coverts showing dark shafts. The white in the primary coverts was more extensive than the amount of white in the secondary coverts. This is typical for a Sooty Shearwater.
- The throat was darker compared to the chin, which is a supporting feature.

The photographs and measurements were also shared with Robert Flood, who confirmed the identification as Sooty Shearwater (Robert Flood in email dated 11 August 2025).

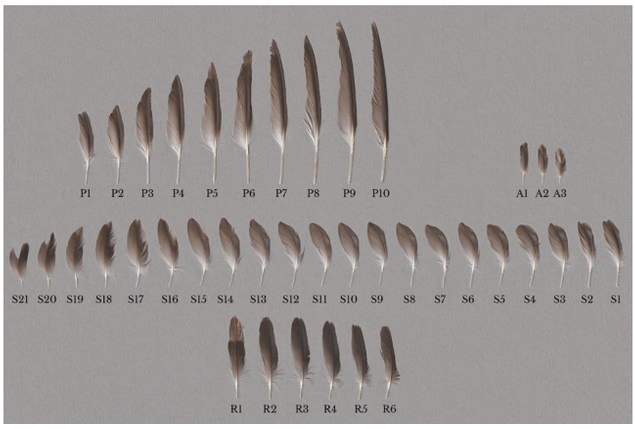
Sooty Shearwater is one of the most common seabirds in the world. They breed in large colonies in the southern Pacific and southern Atlantic Oceans, particularly on islands off south-eastern Australia, New Zealand, and Tierra del Fuego (Carboneras et al. 2024) and are known for their long-distance migrations from the southern hemisphere to the northern hemisphere. While the species has a broad marine distribution, they are relatively rare in the north Indian Ocean (Anderson et al. 2016; Carboneras et al. 2024) and there is only one previously published record from Indian waters - off the coast of Mangalore, Karnataka in 2023 (Srinivasan et al. 2023; Praveen 2025).

A study skin with extended wing, and individual flight feathers were prepared and preserved by the Feather Library in collaboration with the Research Collections Facility at National Centre for Biological Sciences (NCBS-TIFR), Bangalore **[217]**. Tissue samples were also preserved at NCBS Research Collections Facility. The voucher codes for the specimen are FTLB-GJ-152001 (Feather Library www.featherlibrary.com/specimen/ftlbgj152001/) and NRC-AA-5873 (NCBS Research Collections Facility), linking all associated data and materials.

Table 1. Key measurements of the specimen in comparison with the typical range of Short-tailed and Sooty Shearwater (Flood & Fisher 2020).

	Range for Short-tailed Shearwater	Range for Sooty Shearwater	Specimen
Total length	400-430 mm	430-460 mm	414 mm
Wingspan	910-990 mm	970-1060 mm	1030 mm
Bill length	29-34 mm	37-43 mm	41.4 mm
Ratio of nasal tubes vs total bill length	30.9%	25.7%	27.1%
Ratio of culminicorn vs total bill length	28.0%	34.4%	33.9%
Ratio of maxillary unguis vs total bill length	41.1%	39.9%	39.0%

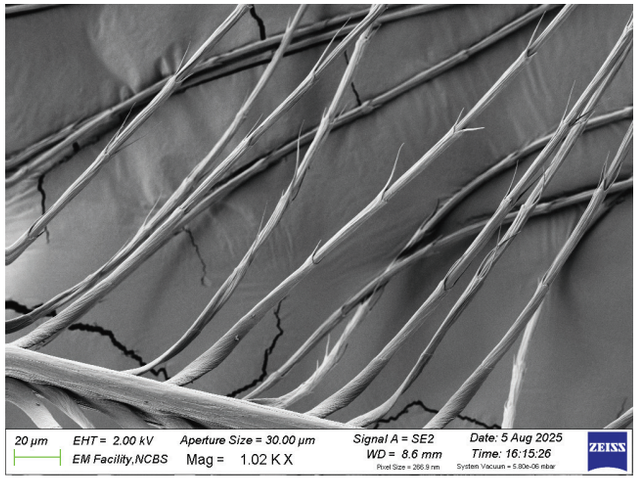
216. Specimen (FTLB-GJ-152001) of Sooty Shearwater at Feather Library. (a) Dorsal view (b) Ventral View (In collaboration with Research Collections Facility, NCBS-TIFR).

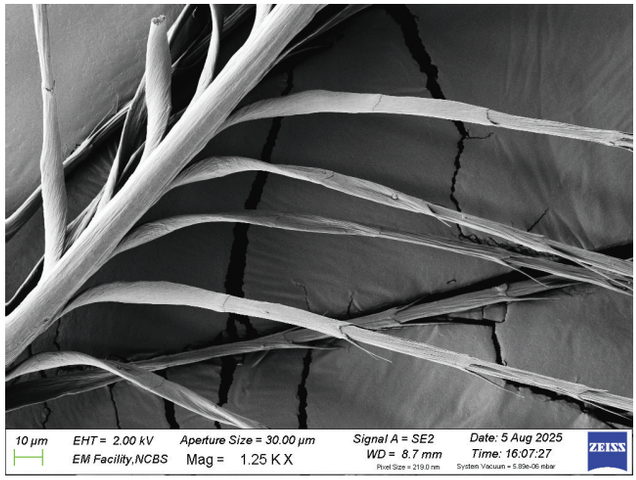


All photos: Feather Library

217. Feather plate of FTLB-GJ-152001

EM further documented the feather microstructure of the specimen using a scanning electron microscope (SEM, Zeiss The MERLIN Compact VP) (Fig. 1). This high-resolution imaging contributes to a growing comparative dataset for seabird feather microanatomy, which is valuable for species identification, aerodynamic studies, and forensic feather analysis (Kashyap et al. 2024).





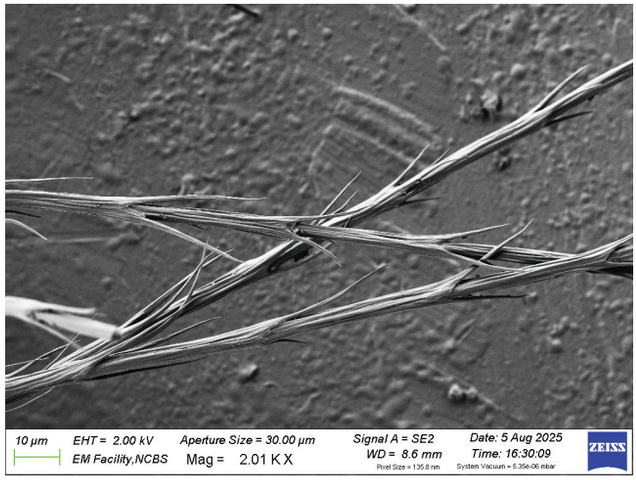


Fig. 1. Scanning microscopic image showing the nodes of the plumulaceous barbules of FTLB-GJ-152001.

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The Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola* from Hokersar Wetland, Jammu and Kashmir, India

Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola* is a medium sized wader, also known as Common Pratincole, Red-winged Pratincole or European Pratincole (Sangha 2021). In India, it is a local summer visitor to Gujarat, where it breeds, and a passage migrant elsewhere (Sangha 2021; Praveen 2025). In non-breeding season, it spreads thinly in Peninsular India, locally in Chilika (Odisha) and south-western coastal plains. Inland reports from Deccan, Andamans, northern and central India are likely to be of migrating birds (Praveen 2025).

On 08 May 2024, HS visited Hokersar Wetland, Srinagar District, Jammu & Kashmir (34.102°N, 74.715°E; *c.*1,600 m asl). At 1150 h, he observed a pratincole resting close to the lake and took some photographs. It was in breeding plumage **[217]**. The lores were black and the black gorget was encircling the pale throat. The red at the base of bill was prominent and present on both the upper and lower mandibles. The eye-ring was pale and tail was deeply forked and extended beyond the wingtips. A white trailing edge to the secondaries, a feature diagnostic for separating it from similar looking Oriental Pratincole *G. maldivarum* (Grimmett et al. 1998; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012), was also observed **[218]**. Based on these features, it was identified as a Collared Pratincole in breeding plumage. The images were sent to Ashwin Viswanathan, (pers. comm. dated 08 May 2024) and later to Prasad Ganpule (pers. comm. dated 28 February 2025), both confirmed the bird as a Collared Pratincole. The bird was seen again the next day, on 09 May 2024 at the same place, but was not seen after that. It was probably migrating to its breeding grounds in Central Asia (Maclean & Kirwan 2020).

217. Collared Pratincole in breeding plumage photographed from Hokersar Wetland, Jammu & Kashmir.

218. Collared Pratincole photographed from Hokersar Wetland, Jammu & Kashmir showing white trailing edge to the secondaries.

Both photos: Hafizullah Sofi

On 05 May 2025, HS again saw a pair of Collared Pratincole, *c.*200 m away from the previous site **[217]**. These were also identified by the above-mentioned features. The birds were regularly seen thereafter by various birders. A maximum of seven birds were recorded at the same spot on 25 May 2025 by HS. The last sighting was on 06 June 2025, when three birds were seen (Sofi 2025). A single bird was also photographed on 07 May 2025 at Wular Lake in Bandipora District, Jammu & Kashmir (Jeelani 2025).

These sightings were not surprising, as there have been records from neighbouring Ladakh (Pfister 2001, 2004), Himachal Pradesh (Dhadwal & Kanwar 2018) and Punjab (Grimmett et al. 2011; Sangha 2021). There were no previous records of this species from Jammu & Kashmir before these sightings and it is included in the bird checklist of Jammu & Kashmir (Kichloo 2025) based on these observations.

We thank Ashwin Viswanathan and Prasad Ganpule for confirming the identification.

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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, Sirmaur 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).

C. Abhinav

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

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-Edwardes 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, Sirmaur 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 Sirmaur 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.

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