

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.

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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– Padma Gyalpo

Shey Choldan House, Leh, 194101, Union Territory of Ladakh, India.
E-mail: gyalpo4086@gmail.com. [PG] [Corresponding author]



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



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

Both photos: Padma Gyalpo

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 Sirmour 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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– Vikas Sharma, Saiyam Nagar, Mohit Kohli,
Sidharth Nagar & Gurpartap Singh

Vikas Sharma, C/o Dr. Salil Sharma, Post Graduate Govt. College for Girls, Sector 11, Chandigarh, 160011, India. E-mail: sarjanachd@gmail.com [VS]

Saiyam Nagar, H. No 3423, Sector 46-C, Chandigarh, 160047, India. E-mail: saiyam84@gmail.com [SN]

Mohit Kohli, H. No. 2047/1, Sector 45-C, Chandigarh, 160047, India. E-mail: m.kohli@live.com [MK]

Sidharth Nagar, H. No. 3423, Sector 46-C, Chandigarh, 160047, India. E-mail: sidharth.nagar@hdfcbank.com [SN]

Gurpartap Singh, 1969, Sector 64, Mohali, 160062, District Sahibzada Ajit Singh Nagar, Punjab, India. E-mail: prof.gurpartap.singh@gmail.com [GPS] [Corresponding author]

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).



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 Khatri (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