

Taxonomic updates to the checklists of birds of India and the South Asian region—2026

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Introduction

This is the eleventh annual taxonomic update to the checklists of birds of India, the Indian Subcontinent, and the South Asian region after Praveen et al. (2016). Since our last update (Praveen & Jayapal 2024a), the first version of Avilist (<https://www.avilist.org/>), the much-awaited unified global checklist of birds, was launched in June 2025. Avilist (Avilist Core Team 2025) is a future-proof checklist integrating the three taxonomies - IOC taxonomy (Gill et al. 2025), the eBird/Clements (Clements et al. 2025) and BirdLife International (HBW & BirdLife International 2025), and is published by a consortium of partner organizations including these three global taxonomic authorities and International Ornithologists' Union. It is managed and overseen by a global Executive Committee, assisted by several regional committees, with the first author (PJ) serving on the Regional Advisory Group-Tropical Asia. Avilist will, henceforth, serve as the sole taxonomic checklist of the birds of the world, with other global lists preparing for a gradual merger/alignment; towards this direction, IOC has already adopted Avilist taxonomy with the cessation of their bi-annual updates with their last iteration as v15.1. And, eBird/Clements has declared an Avilist-compliant taxonomy by October 2026, while BirdLife International has notified their intention to migrate to Avilist (though timelines are yet to be announced). As India Checklist has been following eBird/Clements for both nomenclature and taxonomy since 2024 and eBird/Clements is planning to fully align with Avilist in 2026, we have also decided to adopt Avilist following eBird/Clements from next update onwards. However, the taxonomic alignment between eBird/Clements and Avilist is already near-complete for South Asian birds, with only minor updates effected by eBird/Clements this year. Hence, our current update is also minimal.

Methodology

Though we are fully compliant with eBird/Clements backbone taxonomy, there are, still, discrepancies in the 'species authority' field between our Checklist and eBird/Clements as well as Avilist (see Praveen J & Jayapal 2023; Praveen & Jayapal 2024b). We are working with the Avilist bibliographic team to sort out the differences. In continuation of our core language policy, we retain the Oxford spellings for variously spelt English words (like grey versus gray, and colour versus color) in the English names of birds (*contra* eBird/Clements). Avilist is also considering standardizing English names, but we have not taken any decision in that regard yet.

Results

In this update (Table 1), there are no new species additions or deletions to the Checklist following taxonomic splits in any of the regionally occurring forms of species. Three changes involved extralimital splits that resulted in a change in the specific epithet of the regional form. We have also made one family level transition that involved nomen priority where one replaced the other. The taxonomic sequence and scientific names of birds in both India Checklist and eBird/Clements are completely aligned with each other. However, there are still seven cases where the year of species description is different from eBird/Clements (see Praveen J & Jayapal 2023; Praveen & Jayapal 2024b).

We continue to abide by our guiding principle for English names to maintain a nomenclature that is largely stable, familiar to the local birding community, and alive to current global usage and taxonomy. However, due to extralimital species splits, we have moved the primary English name of the involved taxa to maintain global stability of names.

Table 1. Annotated list of taxonomic updates and nomenclatural changes to the checklist of the birds of India and the South Asian region

S. No.	English name	Scientific name	Notes on taxonomy / nomenclature	Type of change
1	Little Heron	<i>Butorides atricapilla</i> (Afzelius, 1804)	Species split from <i>Butorides striata</i> sensu lato following recommendations of Mendales (2023) and Avilist. English name changed from Striated Heron to Little Heron.	Extralimital split & English name change
2	Demoiselle Crane	<i>Grus virgo</i> (Linnaeus, 1758)	Genus <i>Anthropoides</i> lumped with <i>Grus</i> based on the recommendations of Avilist.	Genus lump
3	Blue-billed White-Tern	<i>Gygis candida</i> (Gmelin, 1789)	Species split from <i>Gygis alba</i> sensu lato following recommendations of Pratt (2020) and Avilist. English name changed from White Tern to Blue-billed White-Tern.	Extralimital split & English name change
4	Bush Warblers & allies	Cettiidae	Family name Scotocercidae replaced with Cettiidae following Avilist; retain all species previously treated under Scotocercidae.	Family name change

With all these changes and updates, the total number of regionally occurring species now stands at 1,473 (Table 4). For India, this means 1211 regularly occurring species with 142 vagrants and 29 historical species.

Table 4. Summary of taxonomic rank for South Asia, Indian Subcontinent, and India

Region	South Asia	Indian Subcontinent	India	Regular	Vagrant	Historical
Order	28	28		27	1	0
Family	117	117		111	4	1
Genus	520	516		464	33	4
Species	1473	1458		1211	142	29

List of Historical Species with year of last report in brackets: Mute Swan *Cygnus olor* (1897), Pink-headed Duck* *Rhodonessa caryophyllacea* (1935), Green Peafowl *Pavo muticus* (1928), Japanese Quail *Coturnix japonica* (1923), Himalayan Quail* *Ophrysia superciliosa* (1876), Manipur Bush Quail* *Perdicula manipurensis* (1932), Pallas's Sandgrouse *Syrrhaptes paradoxus* (1924), Pin-tailed Sandgrouse *Pterocles alchata* (1957), European Turtle-Dove *Streptopelia turtur* (1982), Little Bustard *Tetrax tetrax* (1910), Red Kite *Milvus milvus* (1994), Masked Finfoot* *Helioptais personatus* (1910), Great Snipe *Gallinago media* (1933), Swinhoe's Snipe *Gallinago megala* (1950), White-faced Storm-Petrel *Pelagodroma marina* (1964), Rufous-backed Dwarf-Kingfisher *Ceyx rufidorsa* (1909), Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus* (1880), Eurasian Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus* (1936), Azure Tit *Cyanistes cyanus* (1930), Clicking Shrike-Babbler *Pteruthius intermedius* (1950), Collared Myna *Acridotheres albocinctus* (1945), Chinese Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus yunnanensis* (1951), Claudia's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus claudiae* (1950), Manchurian Bush Warbler

Horornis canturians (1955), Blunt-winged Warbler* *Acrocephalus concinens* (1937), Large-billed Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus orinus* (1933), Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus* (1990), White's Thrush *Zoothera aurea* (1987), and Sillem's Rosefinch *Carpodacus sillemi* (1929). Of these 29 species, five resident species are marked with an asterix, signifying possible local extinctions (SolB 2023).

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In Memoriam

SUNITI BHUSHAN DATTA

(05 NOVEMBER 1977 – 14 NOVEMBER 2025)

In Memoriam

JASJIT MANSINGH

(06 JULY 1938 – 28 NOVEMBER 2025)