Lesser Kestrel
Taxonomy update
White-faced Plover

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Plumage variability in the Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni* in India

Nirav Bhatt & Prasad Ganpule

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Introduction

The Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni* is a widely distributed small falcon, breeding from western Europe, through northern Africa, south-eastern Europe, Asia Minor, Levant, Iran to southern Siberia, Mongolia and northern China and wintering mainly in southern Africa and locally in South Asia (Orta & Kirwan 2020). It was stated to be 'uncommon, irregular passage migrant and rare winter migrant to the subcontinent, with some stragglers overwintering in India' by Naoroji (2006) and as 'rare and local' in India by Rasmussen & Anderton (2012).

In the last ten years, sporadic sightings of Lesser Kestrel have been reported from almost all-over peninsular India and north-eastern India, with regular sightings from Maharashtra and some parts of southern India (eBird 2025). Flocks of Lesser Kestrels are reported as passage migrants during October to December from places like Tal Chhapar in Rajasthan, Velavadar in Gujarat (eBird 2025) and Champaran region in Bihar; in the latter site they are seen in mixed flock with Amur Falcons *F. amurensis* during migration (Sharma 2025). Some birds have been observed throughout winter from December to March in places like the Little Rann of Kutch in Gujarat, Lonawala in Maharashtra, Hyderabad outskirts in Telangana, and Tirunelveli in Tamil Nadu (eBird 2025; pers. obsv. NB).

Details regarding the plumage variability and plumage types are lacking in Lesser Kestrels observed in India. We present here preliminary results of plumage variations of adult male Lesser Kestrels observed in this country.

Taxonomy

The Lesser Kestrel is treated as a monotypic species by all major taxonomies (Orta & Kirwan 2020), including the recent Avilist checklist (AviList Core Team 2025). Regional works (Naoroji 2006; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012) do not discuss the plumage variations seen in Lesser Kestrels in India. However, recent investigations into the plumage variation in Lesser Kestrel across its global range show that the eastern-most populations breeding in China, *F. n. pekinensis*, should be treated as a separate subspecies – see Corso (2013), Corso et al. (2015), and Corso et al. (2016) for more details regarding taxonomic history of Lesser Kestrel and the recommendations for treating *pekinensis* as a separate subspecies. Corso et al. (2016) also suggested that the wintering areas of all populations of Lesser Kestrels needed to be determined. Matching the findings in Corso's works, a genetic study (Ferrer Obiol et al. 2025) confirmed the existence of two main phylogenetic groups: in fact, genetic differentiation analyses coherently indicated the existence of two distinct lineages—a western lineage including all the European and Middle Eastern populations and an eastern lineage including all populations from Central and eastern Asia, chiefly those from China.

During the preparation of the Gujarat field guide (Ganpule et al. 2022), PG noted that a few adult males photographed by NB in the Little Rann of Kachchh and seen in the Velavadar National Park did not match with the typical *F. n. pekinensis* shown in Corso et al. (2016). Hence, to depict the plumage variation in Lesser Kestrels in Gujarat, photographs of two adult males were selected, which showed maximum differences in amount of grey in the upperwing coverts; these are given in photographs 99a & 99b in Ganpule et al. (2022),.which also highlighted this variation thus "Birds seen in Gujarat are mainly of *pekinensis*-type but intermediate as well as nominate-type birds were noted. Further study is required".

Methods

We have been monitoring the Lesser Kestrel in Gujarat and its status and distribution in the state has been discussed earlier (Bhatt & Ganpule 2013). In this study, we discuss and document the plumage variations in adult male Lesser Kestrels in India with Corso et al. (2016) as basis. For this, we have documented Lesser Kestrels in Gujarat while NB also visited Maharashtra and photographed adult male Lesser Kestrels there. In addition to this, we collected photographs of adult males from all over India, posted on citizen science platforms of 'eBird' and 'iNaturalist', and also on the social media like Facebook and even those circulated on WhatsApp groups. Photographs were also collected from birdwatchers individually. Only adult males were considered for this study; immatures and juveniles/females were not analyzed. In sub-adult plumages, the amount of grey in the wings is not discernable. Even when the mantle is adult-type, the wing coverts may be juvenile while in moulting individuals **[220]** it is difficult to judge the amount of grey in the wings since the juvenile-type wing coverts are barred rather than grey **[221]**. We did not study museum specimens; there are limited museum specimens of Lesser Kestrels from India, only 16 specimens from India are listed on GBIF (https://www.gbif.org/) of which 14 are housed in NHMUK and all of them were part of the study by Corso et al. (2015) and Corso et al. (2016).

From all the photographs collected, we checked the plumage of each individual. We then separated the individuals according to the following plumage features suggested by Corso et al. (2015) and Corso et al. (2016):

1. Amount of grey in upperwing coverts
2. The colour of head (dark or light grey tones)
3. The mantle colour
4. Underpart colour and the markings on the breast and belly

Sudhir Paul

220. Transitional second-calendar year (2nd calendar year) male Lesser Kestrel in moult. The mantle is fully moulted into adult-type, though the colour looks less saturated than in typical *pekinensis* and the head looks paler. Note that the wing coverts are juvenile-type making subspecies identification difficult as the amount of grey in the wings is not seen. March 2017, Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu.

Nirav Bhatt

221. Transitional second-calendar year (2nd calendar year) male Lesser Kestrel in flight. There is some rufous visible on greater secondary coverts, which are turning grey (actively moulting). Rufous median and lesser coverts, pale head and less saturated red mantle. Note the adult type central rectrices (central T1 pair), rump and uppertail-coverts. Such birds cannot be safely identified to subspecies. January 2020, Little Rann of Kachchh, Gujarat.

Based on these criteria, we selected the individuals showing the maximum plumage differences so that the entire range of plumages seen in Lesser Kestrels in India could be summarized. We followed the classification given in Corso et al. (2015) and Corso et al. (2016) in assigning individuals to a specific plumage type; we divided the birds in four groups as done by the authors – Group A (typical *pekinensis*-type), Group B & C (intermediate between *pekinensis* and nominate *naumanni*-type), and Group D (*naumanni*-type). The Groups B & C are combined here for convenience. It should be noted that camera settings are important in ascertaining the plumage colours and many times, the contrast and/or colour settings can distort the plumage. Hence, we checked all photographs for correct plumage colours. We also checked photographs of adult male Lesser Kestrels from the core breeding ranges of nominate and *pekinensis* subspecies. For example, we compared a typical nominate *naumanni* from Spain (Cabrera 2025) with entire rufous wing coverts with a typical *pekinensis* from Mongolia (Colenutt 2017) with entire slaty-grey wing coverts to understand the extreme variations in plumages shown by Lesser Kestrels across their range. This helped us in understanding the plumage types seen across different regions. All photographs of different individuals presented here are given with detailed captions.

Results

The plumage variations seen in Lesser Kestrels in India are as follows:

1. Typical *pekinensis*-type (Group A): Such individuals have entire upperwing coverts of lead grey colour, or may have rufous fringes to marginal coverts (along the leading edge of upperwing) with other coverts lead grey. The grey tones are much darker and the plumage colours are more saturated when compared with birds in Group D. The mantle is more chestnut (usually orange-red in nominate *naumanni*) and the underparts are richer in colour **[222–224]**.

2. Intermediate type (Group B & C): Such individuals generally have approximately half upperwing coverts greyish and half of the same colour as mantle. The amount of grey in the upperwing coverts is variable; many birds have marginal and median coverts rufous with rest of the upperwing coverts greyish. The mantle and underparts are less rich in colour than in typical *pekinensis* though this is variable. Birds falling in this type are presented here **[225–227]**.

3. Typical *naumanni*-type (Group D): Such individuals show very less grey in the upperwing coverts. The overall plumage is paler and the grey on the head is less intense. The mantle is more orange-red than chestnut. Such individuals are very rare in India and one bird is presented here in **[228]**. The one depicted in **[228]**, from Gujarat, is the only instance we could find from India.

Nirav Bhatt

222. Group A – *pekinensis*-type. Typical *pekinensis* with completely lead-grey wing coverts with very little rufous on the lesser upper coverts. Note the dark grey head and much saturated red on the mantle. The underparts show sparse spotting, with entire underparts deeply rufous. December 2022, Lonavla, Maharashtra.

Nirav Bhatt

223. Group A – *pekinensis*-type. Same bird as [3]. Typical *pekinensis* with completely lead-grey wing coverts with very little rufous on the lesser upper coverts. In flight, the amount on grey in the upperwings can be seen in detail. December 2022, Lonavla, Maharashtra.

Manoj Sharma

226. Group B/C – Intermediate-type. This individual is similar to the one shown in **[225]**, with wings showing less grey compared to Group A type individuals but mantle looks darker. Underparts pale rufous with spotting. October 2011, Tal Chappar, Rajasthan.

Saurabh Desai

224. Group A – *pekinensis*-type. Typical *pekinensis* with completely lead-grey wing coverts with very little rufous on the lesser upper coverts. Note the much darker mantle colour. The head is dark grey and the underparts lack spotting, with upper breast looking more saturated rufous. Note that the natural lighting here makes the bird look more yellowish. December 2014, Little Rann of Kachchh, Gujarat.

Sudhir Paul

227. Group B/C – Intermediate-type. All lesser coverts and some median coverts are rufous while remaining wing is grey. Head dark grey and mantle colour is not as red as usually seen in *pekinensis*-type. Could be from intergrade zone closer to nominate *naumanni* breeding zone, as the amount of grey in the wings is less. March 2017, Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu.

Arpit Bansal

225. Group B/C – Intermediate-type. Most of lesser upper coverts are rufous while other coverts are grey. Compared with birds in Group A, the mantle and underparts look paler while the head is pale grey. An intermediate-type individual. October 2021, Tal Chappar, Rajasthan.

Nirav Bhatt

228. Group D – nominate *naumanni*-type. Typical *naumanni*-type individual, where besides the secondary coverts, most other coverts are rufous, with rufous extending up to the shoulder. Paler grey head and mantle not as deep reddish as usually seen in *pekinensis*. The amount of grey in the wings is very much restricted when compared with Group A or Group B/C type individuals, hence likely to be nominate *naumanni*. December 2010, Little Rann of Kachchh, Gujarat.

Discussion

As can be seen from the photographs reported in this paper, there is considerable plumage variation in Lesser Kestrels seen in India. Occurrence of typical *pekinensis*-type, intermediate type and *naumanni*-type (just one instance) has been documented and all four groups of birds are seen here; it is likely that Lesser Kestrels from a wide breeding range visit India.

Corso et al. (2015) showed that birds from Group A, and possibly Group B, were winter visitors to India. However, individuals with much lesser grey in the wing coverts, matching to nominate *naumanni*-type, have been noted in India, which has not been reported before. The museum specimens from India, which were checked by Corso et al. (2015), were of *pekinensis*-type. Corso et al. (2016), in photographs nos. 430 and 431 show a male Lesser Kestrel collected from Assam, India, in 1880, which is presumed to be a *pekinensis*, with all upperwing coverts dark grey[1].

Praveen (2025), in his synopsis, states that the Indian wintering / passage migrant population has been previously assigned to *pekinensis*. It is interesting to note that most of the photographs we checked were either typical *pekinensis*-type or of intermediate type. Birds with very less grey in the wing coverts were found to be quite rare in India. Further, there is no geographical separation regarding various types of birds seen in India; *pekinensis*-type as well as intermediate type individuals are seen widely throughout the country. For example, *pekinensis*-type birds are seen in north-eastern India as well as in Maharashtra and Gujarat and in other parts of the country while intermediate-types have been seen in Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu. However, the nominate *naumanni*-type bird has been noted only in Gujarat. It is interesting to note that in Tamil Nadu, intermediate-type and *pekinensis*-type birds were observed together; the intermediate-type individual shown here in **[8]** from Tamil Nadu was seen in a flock of typical *pekinensis*-type birds. Corso et al. (2016), in the map, show the breeding range of nominate *naumanni* extending eastwards to approximately eastern Europe and western Russia. It is very likely that some individuals breeding in this region could well visit western India in the winter. Another nominate *naumanni*-type individual, with very less grey in the wings, which we checked, was seen and photographed in Jammu & Kashmir (Sharma 2018), but we did not include it in our study since it was not an adult as it showed some faint markings on the lower mantle.

It should be noted that that this is only a rudimentary analysis of adult male birds seen in India. We did not analyze abundance of the different type of individuals seen all over the country and this could be a subject of future work to figure out the pattern of occurrence of 'A' type birds vs 'B' & 'C' type birds. We also did not analyze any females or juveniles. Though adult males are easy to identify, female and juveniles are often confused with Common Kestrel *F. tinnunculus,* making it somewhat difficult to get a correct idea of the status and distribution of Lesser Kestrel in India.

Conclusion

There is considerable plumage variation in adult male Lesser Kestrels in India, which has not been reported in the reference works. While the majority of individuals seen here are *pekinensis*-type or intermediate type, the occurrence of *naumanni*-type birds has also been noted in the country. We recommend that Lesser Kestrels, with morphological variations, be trapped and satellite-tagged in India, so that the global breeding ranges of Lesser Kestrels wintering or passing through India can be determined.

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1 It is pertinent to point out that there is typographical error in Corso et al. (2015); photograph no. 17, labelled as a *F. naumanni pekinensis,* is a nominate *naumanni*, collected from Spain and wrongly labelled.

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

Praveen J & Rajah Jayapal

Praveen, J., & Jayapal, R., 2025. Taxonomic updates to the checklists of birds of India and the South Asian region–2026. *Indian BIRDS* 21 (6): 165–166.
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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, discrepencies 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	*Butorides atricapilla* (Afzelius, 1804)	Species split from *Butorides striata* 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	*Grus virgo* (Linnaeus, 1758)	Genus *Anthropoides* lumped with *Grus* based on the recommendations of Avilist.	Genus lump
3	Blue-billed White-Tern	*Gygis candida* (Gmelin, 1789)	Species split from *Gygis alba* 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* *Heliopais 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 (SoIB 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)

Observations at a nest of a Grey Francolin *Ortygornis pondicerianus* in an urban area

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Introduction

The Grey Francolin *Ortygornis pondicerianus* is a widespread member of the Galliformes, and is common in most parts of India except the wet zone and much of the high- and trans Himalaya (Praveen 2025). Its breeding occurs through most of the year though there are two documented peaks: March to May, and August to October (Islam 2021). It is a typically ground-nesting species while it is also known to nest in bushes, piles of harvested crop, and other sites (Ali & Ripley 1987; Islam 2021). Previous studies have highlighted the species' adaptability in nesting site selection; however most studies found nest locations away from human settlements (Hussain et al. 2012; Khalil et al. 2016; Pandian 2021). This provides a context for the present observations as the nesting behaviour of a pair of Grey Francolins in this study were documented in a residential garden of a densely populated urban locality in Jaipur, Rajasthan, in May 2022. However, it is generally a common species around Jaipur, including urban settings like this one.

Study Site & Methodology

Observations were made at my private residence in Nemi Nagar Extension, Vaishali Nagar, Jaipur (26.910°N, 75.730°E), Rajasthan, India in May 2022. The region has a monsoon-influenced hot semi-arid climate, with extremely hot and long summers, moderate rainfall in monsoon, and mild to warm short winters. A single nest was monitored daily (24x7 surveillance) using a mini wireless night vision camera with motion detection and high-definition resolution (1080p) to ensure quality of recorded outputs, with observations recorded manually as well, from live feed. The camera was positioned discreetly and standard protocols were followed during nest monitoring to minimize disturbance to birds and habitat (Barve et al. 2020). Data collected include timing of incubation, brooding patterns, hatching sequence, and chick departure from the nest. All photographs are screengrabs from the video camera and hence of lower quality. However, original videos have been uploaded in Macaulay Library (Bhardwaj 2022).

Results & Discussion

On 04 May 2022, I found the nest concealed in a clump of Nahar Kantha *Asparagus racemosus* *c.*50 cm above the ground **[229]**. The nest was located within a dry grassland-scrub mosaic, characterized by sparse *Cenchrus ciliaris* and *Dichanthium annulatum* grasses interspersed with *Capparis sepiaria* shrubs. Such habitat preference closely matches the known nesting ecology of the Grey Francolin, which prefers ground-level nesting sites concealed within grass tussocks or under small shrubs in open scrub or agricultural margins. The clutch comprised seven pale buff-coloured, smooth, slightly glossy, unmarked eggs **[229]**. Considering the proximity of the nest, I immediately installed my camera setup and started watching the daily proceedings through live feed. This arrangement provided uninterrupted access to the nest without creating any disturbance to the breeding birds. I did not watch the nest continuously but only intermittently, as I was interested to see when the clutch hatched. During the entire observation period, the incubating bird was identified as the female, distinguished by its comparatively smaller size, slightly duller plumage, and behaviour of consistently remaining on the nest, while the accompanying male stayed nearby but never undertook incubation **[230]**. Female-specific brooding has been previously documented for this species (Ali & Ripley 1987; Islam 2021). However, the female seems to be leaving the nest unattended, daily, presumably for foraging. Though I did not record every instance when the bird was absent, some of the absence periods varied from one-to-three hours (Table 1). The bird left the nest at least twice a day; in the morning (between 0530 and 0630h) and post noon (between 1330 and 1530h). Morning breaks were usually short (28–72 minutes) while afternoon breaks were longer (64–240 minutes). However, the brooding was consistent and the female was present at the nest every night. All seven eggs remained visible and appeared protected until they hatched on 22 May 2022. No predators were observed around the nest during this period, either on the camera or otherwise.

Table 1. Observations during brooding period in May 2022

Date	Departure	Absence Duration (minutes)
15 May	05:36	59.75
15 May	13:34	157.78
16 May	05:36	55.75
16 May	13:31	93.80
17 May	05:50	72.40
17 May	14:07	117.48
18 May	06:02	45.67
18 May	14:02	139.35
19 May	05:42	62.20
19 May	14:19	64.45
20 May	05:56	71.52
20 May	13:28	239.80
21 May	06:20	28.22
21 May	15:32	171.37

229. Clutch of seven cream-coloured eggs discovered near my house on 04 May 2022.

230. A female Grey Francolin incubating the eggs on 04 May 2022

231. Minor egg wobbling observed in the clutch.

232. Female assisting hatching of eggs by pecking on it.

233. Two chicks visible

234. Female consuming the egg yolk after the chicks have hatched.

235. All seven hatched chicks clearly visible.

236. Female shows signs of movement with chicks underneath her.

All photos: Surveillance camera installed by the author

237. Female standing upright with chicks moving under her

238. Adult left the nest and six chicks visible, as they are leaving the nest

239. Empty nest with no chicks

All photos: Surveillance camera installed by the author

On the morning of 22 May, the female did not leave the nest for her usual sortie indicating that the eggs might hatch on that day. The female remained near the nest from then on throughout the hatching process detailed in Table 2. All eggs hatched between 0901h and 1237h, a period of about 3.5 hrs. However, the next day when the chicks left the nest along with the female, I could only count six chicks and no trace of the seventh chick could be found (Table 2). While the chicks were leaving the nest along with the female, the male remained nearby, giving alarm calls.

After the chicks left the nest, no other activity was observed in the nest. I physically inspected the nest after the chicks have left the nest. It was empty, with only eggshells remaining.

This is probably the first camera-assisted observations of a Grey Francolin nest within its native range. Clutch size of seven that I observed is within the range of the clutch, 4–12, reported for wild populations (Khalil et al. 2016; Islam 2021). The incubation period of Grey Francolin is reported to be between 18–22 days (Islam 2021). In this case, it took at least 18 days to hatch as we do not know when the entire clutch got laid. It has been documented that the eggs are laid over multiple days, sometimes over alternate days (Khalil et al. 2016). So, it is quite likely that the first egg may have been laid in the last week of April 2022. In our case, the clutch had a complete hatching success but it is unclear where one chick disappeared within a few hours. This is probably the first study to report the total hatching time of a clutch of Grey Francolins, as 3.5 hours. The fact that the chicks were mobile immediately after hatching, and left the nest within 14 hours of their hatching, and that period included one night, reaffirms their strong nidifugous habits.

Table 2. Observations during hatching in May 2022

Date	Time	Activity	Figure
22 May	9:01:32	Minor egg wobbling observed; no visible sign of pipping yet.	231
22 May	9:02:36	Observed wobbling as the chick, still in the early post-hatching stage with poor coordination of head and limb movements, attempted to emerge; during this process, the female actively assisted by pecking at and cracking the shell.	232
22 May	11:41:50	Two chicks were visible, in down feathers.	233
22 May	11:51:56	Once most chicks had hatched and begun moving, the female was observed consuming the residual yolk.	234
22 May	17:39:54	All seven chicks clearly visible while they were moving.	235
23 May	9:05:17	The incubating female showed initial signs of activity within the nest, shifting position and adjusting nesting material before leaving.	236
23 May	9:05:39	Female stands up, in upright position, pecking. Chicks alert and moving under the adult.	237
23 May	9:05:48	When the adult left the nest, six chicks were visible, and the pair gave repeated contact calls directed toward the brood.	238
23 May	9:06:08	Six chicks left the nest.	239

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The White-faced Plover *Anarhynchus dealbatus* in Andaman & Nicobar Islands, India

On 21 October 2025, at 1515 h, while birding near a forest camp site at Galathea (6.820°N, 93.864°E) in the Great Nicobar Island, PS & AF first observed and photographed a distant plover which on first impression was paler and more whitish compared to a nearby Tibetan Sand-Plover *Anarhynchus atrifrons*. They showed the image to SG and his group photographing Nicobar Megapode *Megapodius nicobariensis* nearby and decided to get a better look at the individual to rule out any possibility of a Malaysian Plover *A. peronii* or a White-faced Plover *A. dealbatus* due to Great Nicobar Island's proximity to the Malay Peninsula. Two birds were seen feeding together, both with prominent white collar but with one individual standing in behind had much paler legs and appearance than the bird in the font. Photographs of both birds were taken for comparison. One bird fit the description of a Kentish Plover *A. alexandrinus*, a common wintering species in the Andaman & Nicobar Islands. We scrutinized the second individual with paler appearance and transmitted the images to Dave Bakewell and James Eaton, experts on Southeast Asian birds of the Malay Peninsula.

The second bird was later identified, from photographs, as a White-faced Plover, a species that had been reported once previous from the Andaman Islands though with insufficient details and no published photographs (Bhopale 2010). We were lucky to have a side-by-side comparison between the two species and the following details could be noted **[240]**.

1. Though not exactly side by side in position, the bill of the White-faced Plover standing behind is slightly thicker and has a more triangular tip than the Kentish Plover standing in the front **[240, 241]**.
2. The White-faced Plover has a broader white nuchal collar than the Kentish Plover **[240]**.
3. The White-faced Plover has a shorter lateral breast patch; the Kentish Plover here clearly shows a longer and thinner breast patch **[240]**.
4. The brown portion under the eye is darker in the Kentish Plover, almost with the same intensity as the brown in rest of its head. However, in the White-face Plover, the brown seems to smudge and grade into the pure white under it. Though it is still the same brown colouration of the crown, it is paler than the brown behind its eye **[240]**.
5. The White-faced Plover has more pale or whiter fringes to the scapulars and coverts compared to the Kentish Plover **[240, 242]**.
6. Legs appear of White-faced Plover appear paler than the Kentish Plover **[240, 242]**.

The combination of the overall paleness of the upperparts, the contrast between the feather centres and edges of the upperpart feathers, the short lateral breast patches, the greater amount of white on the head (frons, nuchal collar, more restricted brown on the ear coverts) as well as the differences in the bare part proportions and colours helps us conclude this as a White-faced Plover. It is probably a first-winter bird based on the white fringes to scapulars and coverts.

240. Kentish Plover in the front and White-faced Plover at the back. Notice the overall paleness and wider nuchal collar of the bird at the back.

241. White-faced Plover showing the white fringes to scapulars and coverts and the thicker bill.

242. White-faced Plover showing the paler legs.

All photos: Shaktivel G

The White-faced Plover is a scarce winter migrant from the southern coasts of China and northern Vietnam down through eastern Vietnam and into Sumatra favour coastal sandy beaches and mudflats (Limparungpatthanakij & Pyle 2023). There is one previous record of White-faced Plover from South Asia from the sandbar of Smith and Rose Islands, North Andamans on 18 March 2010 (Bhopale 2010). Though the note indicates an identification confirmation from Peter Kennerley, it was not included in the checklist of India or South Asia due to insufficient field notes and non-existence of a published photograph (Praveen et al. 2016). We obtained a copy of the available photograph from Nikhil Bhopale (Praveen J., pers. comm. 26 November 2025), consulted Dave Bakewell with this photograph, and he agreed with the identification as to a male White-faced Plover based on the visible features on this single photograph.

1. The crown appears quite bright orange-chestnut. Given this and the blackness of the lateral breast patch, we expect a Kentish Plover to show blacker on the ear

coverts than this bird does. The very restricted and buff colouration on the ear coverts fits White-faced.
2. The broad, white supercilium fits a White-faced Plover.
3. The lateral breast patch appears dark although it is hard to determine its length.
4. The upperparts appear rather pale sandy brown and there is a pronounced whiter area on the outer median and greater coverts. This fits White-faced Plover and would be very odd in a Kentish Plover
5. The wings are long and pointed and the legs appear not to extend beyond the tail. This rules out Malaysian Plover.
6. The legs appear pale pinkish.

We thank Dave Bakewell for commenting on all photographs and providing useful identification features used in this manuscript. We thank Praveen J for providing the details of the 2010 photograph.

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A White-throated Robin *Irania gutturalis* from Karachi, Pakistan: An addition to the birds of the Indian Subcontinent

Indian Subcontinent is a rich avifaunal region in South Asia with a total of 1,452 documented species of birds (Praveen et al. 2025). Each year, the growing birding community, hobbyist bird photographers, and ornithologists keep adding new verifiable species through well-documented records with supporting evidence. Generally, these previously unreported species are found in their natural habitat outside their known distribution range. Every year, some five billion land birds from almost 200 species that breed in Eurasia migrate, with half of them being passerines and allied species in related groups (Hahn et al. 2009). These movements involve medium- or long-range round journeys spanning thousands of kilometres (Newton 2010). Birds utilize stopovers during migration to break endurance flights, so reducing immediate and/or future fitness expenses. In ornithological literature, stopovers on ships are regarded as a rare and anecdotal occurrence. Scientific literature documenting avian occurrences on vessels is limited (Sarà et al. 2023). One such case of a single White-throated Robin *Irania gutturalis* was found stranded on a small boat on 11 April 2024 at Karachi Port, Sindh, Pakistan (24.817°N, 66.976°E), posted on Facebook for identification purpose. This previously undocumented species was found trapped inside a chamber of a longstanding, parked

243. Stranded White-throated Robin in the boat.

244. White-throated Robin showing the white eyebrow and orangish underparts.

245. White-throated Robin showing the characteristic white chin.

All photos: Mohammad Rizwan Sap

private boat, hitting a glass panel in an attempt to escape. It was in exhausted state, which led the observer to put it aside, considering that it was dying **[243–245]**. To his surprise, the bird later gain rigor and flew away (Mohammad Rizwan Sap, pers. comm. 14 April 2024). The bird might have arrived via other vessels and ships at the seaport and ended up in the standing boat. Karachi Port handles most of Pakistan's inbound and outbound cargo and operates 24x7, accommodating vessels up to 75,000 DWT (Shahzad 2022), including international trade, which could be the origin of this bird landing on a vessel as a stopover in the open Arabian Sea.

Comparison with field guide illustrations identified the bird as a White-throated Robin and the same was confirmed by regional experts (Zafeer Ahmed Shaikh and Akram Awan, pers. comm. April 2024). There is no morphologically confusing species in the reported area. Presumably an adult autumn/fresh male with blue-grey crown, upperparts and wings, thin and long white supercilium reaching behind eye, black on face and throat-sides enclosing narrow white chin and throat, rich orange breast, flanks and belly transitioning to white towards vent (Clement & Rose 2015). White-throated Robin is distributed in Asia Minor, southern Caucasus and Levant east to Iran, and from southern Kazakhstan and Tajikistan to west-central and north-eastern Afghanistan as a summer breeding migrant, while it winters in north-eastern and eastern Africa (Collar 2020). There are two unconfirmed anecdotal records from Baluchistan in the form of a pair collected from Chaman on 02 July 1880 by Barnes and another collected by Watson at Quetta in June; both were reported by Murray but were later rejected and deemed unverified indirect observations in proceeding ornithological studies of Baluchistan (Ticehurst 1926:709; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). This species is also absent from all the standard ornithological literature on Pakistan (Ali & Ripley 1987; Roberts 1992; Grimmett et al. 2008). However, it was expected as a potential vagrant to northern areas of Pakistan (Kazimeirczak, 2000). The closest and recent observation to Pakistan is *c.*40 km from the international border at linear distance, reported from Zahedan-Jahad Keshavarzi Garden, Iran, on eBird (Atashpanjeh 2024; Keykha 2025). It is a long-distance migrant with south, south-east, and south-west directional affinities and a potential for vagrancy outside its normal range further west, as it has been reported from the British Isles, The Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, mainland Greece (two records), Cyprus (12 records up to 2006), Egypt (May 1984), and South Africa (Northern Cape, July 2006) (Clement & Rose 2015). The current extralimital record in the east is potentially a spring passage migrant returning from its wintering range in Africa to the breeding grounds in Asia, which is usually done in April, with first-year males usually arriving up to one week ahead of females to secure breeding territory (Clement & Rose 2015). This record is an important addition to the national avifaunal inventory of Pakistan as well as the Indian Subcontinent bird checklist.

My sincere thanks to Mohammad Rizwan Sap for reporting this observation and providing images of this important record.

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The Common Gull *Larus canus* at Mamachiwadi, Virar, near Mumbai: An addition to the avifauna of Maharashtra

On the morning of 14 December 2024, while birding and scanning a gull flock for a potential Caspian Gull *Larus cachinnans* at Mamachiwadi, Virar (19.284°N, 72.452°E), near Mumbai, Maharashtra, India, we noticed a smaller sized gull amongst the larger Lesser Black-backed Gulls *L. fuscus*. Immediately, the different structure was noticeable and we wondered what species we were looking at. The bird mostly rested on the shore, only sometimes standing up when the flock got disturbed. Several pictures were taken to get the underwing and tail pattern along with side-by-side comparison with Lesser Black-backed Gull (Pereira 2024a). The individual took off southwards with two Lesser Black-backed Gulls while the rest of the flock remained.

Upon reviewing images in the field and using Merlin Bird ID App, we realized that the bird seemed like a first calendar-year Common Gull *L. canus*. Since no records were found for Maharashtra in eBird and from a literature search, and given the complexities of gull identification, we approached Prasad Ganpule and Ashwin Viswanathan for confirmation. They agreed with certainty that it was a Common Gull based on the graceful structure, small and compact size, white rounded head, short and slim bill together with longer and lean wings **[246, 247]**.

Subsequent searches were made at nearby locations with no sightings in December and January 2025. However, on 17 February 2025, two individuals were reported at the same site (**[248–251]**, Shenai 2025). These two individuals were observed and photographed by several birders throughout the month of February. The two Common Gulls were actively foraging amongst Lesser Black-backed Gulls *Larus fuscus*, feral Rock Pigeons *Columba livia*, House Crows *Corvus splendens*, Western Reef-Heron *Egretta gularis,* and stray dogs feeding on organic waste at the shore near Arnala Jetty (19.274°N, 72.444°E), *c.*3 km from first site (Pereira 2025).

246. Common Gull showing white rounded head, short and slim beak, and a graceful compact structure photographed on 14 December 2024.

Both photos: Rahul Pereira

247. Common Gull showing longer and lean wings photographed on 14 December 2024.

248. Common Gull with short bill, cute and rounded head, short and a graceful compact structure photographed on 17 February 2025.

Both photos: Ramesh Shenai

249. Common Gull in flight showing longer and lean wings photographed on 17 February 2025.

Rahul Pereira

250. The second Common Gull also showing rounded head, and a graceful compact structure photographed on 17 February 2025.

Ramesh Shenai

251. The second Common Gull in flight photographed on 17 February 2025.

To assess whether either of the individuals were the same as the bird reported in December 2024, we closely inspected the plumages of these birds in comparison with the December individual **[252–254]**. However, since the birds were undergoing moult, it is not quite easy to judge whether the differences were just a result of different stages of moult. The second individual definitely had a longer bill with a more extensive pale bill tip and a pale iridis and flatter head and is not the same as the December individual. However, the December individual was

Rahul Pereira

252. Head structure of Common Gull photographed on 14 December 2024.

superficially similar to the first individual on bill pattern and plumage, but with minor differences. The December bird had a much shorter bill and the gape flange does not extend further inwards from the base of the bill compared to the first bird from February. There is variability in the extent of black on the bill as well, however, that could have changed colour during the intervening period. However, there is a high likelihood that the December individual was different from both the February

Photo: Ramesh Shenai

253. Head structure of the first individual of Common Gull photographed on 17 February 2025. Note similarity of bill structure but difference in the extent of gape flange.

Photo: Rahul Pereira

254. Head structure of the second individual of Common Gull photographed on 17 February 2025. Note the longer bill.

Photos: Rahul Pereira (left), Ramesh Shenai (centre), Rahul Pereira (right)

255. Side profiles of December and the two February individuals respectively showing sparse head striations giving it an almost clean white look. Brown spots on lower hindneck making a half collar or at least a hint of it. Underparts are white with no markings visible. Subspecies *canus* and *kamtschatschensis* would have darker plumage overall and a well-marked head, indicating all three to be *heinei*.

Photos: Rahul Pereira (left), Ramesh Shenai (centre), Rahul Pereira (right)

256. Tails of the three individuals (in the same order as **255**) showing unmarked uppertail coverts. Subspecies *canus* and *kamtschatschensis* would show markings on uppertail coverts.

Photos: Rahul Pereira (left), Ramesh Shenai (centre), Ramesh Shenai (right)

257. Underwing pattern, underparts, vent and undertail coverts of the three individuals (in the same order as **255**). The underwing shows a mostly white wing panel with a dark trailing edge. Underwing covert and auxillary feathers have light brown tips/edges to them. All of the underparts including vent and undertail coverts are white and without any markings. The underwings and underparts of subspecies *canus* and *kamtschatschensis* would be more boldly patterned.

Table 1. Identification of first cycle Common Gull subspecies. There are some overlap and variation of features amongst the subspecies. The table below shows identification pointers in typical birds

Sl. No.	Feature	*canus*	*heinei*	*kamtschatschensis*
1	Head and body	Extensive streaking on head, breast and underparts. Overall plumage is darker than *heinei* but lighter than *kamtschatschensis*.	Sparse head striations giving it an almost clean white look. Brown spots on lower hindneck making a half collar. Usually, unmarked white underparts. Palest plumage amongst the three.	Heavily marked head, strong streaking from breast to undertail coverts. Darkest plumage amongst the three.
2	Uppertail coverts	Marked uppertail coverts.	Unmarked uppertail coverts, rarely has some spots.	Marked uppertail coverts.
3	Underparts, vent and undertail coverts	Unmarked lower belly to vent and marked undertail coverts.	Completely unmarked.	Well-marked lower belly to vent and marked undertail coverts.
4	Underwing pattern	Brown tips to underwing coverts and axillaries. Buff colour overall lacking contrasting dark trailing edge.	Largely white underwing with contrasting dark trailing edge to the wing. Some light brown tips to underwing coverts and axillaries.	Strongly marked underwings. Dark brown tips to underwing coverts and barred axillaries.

individuals.

The Common Gull, sometimes also known as the Mew Gull, is distributed much across the northern Eurasia, and has three subspecies, - *L. c. canus, L. c. kamtschatschensis,* and *L. c. heinei* (Moskoff et al. 2021). Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) state that birds in our region are presumed, on geographical grounds, to be of the subspecies *heinei*, though the nominate *canus* is known to occur as near to our region as the Persian Gulf.

The subspecies identification of Common Gull has been discussed in detail by Adriaens & Gibbs (2016) and the same is covered in Table 1. We provide a commentary **[255–257]** on the three Common Gull individuals we found and the visible features that match *heinei*, in comparison with the other two less likely subspecies, arguing our birds to be a *L. c. heinei*. Lou Bertalan and other members in the Facebook Group *Western Palearctic Gulls* (Pereira 2024b) also suggested this subspecies for the December individual based on white underwing with contrasting darker remiges, and sparse head striation.

Praveen (2025) lists records of Common Gull from India, with records mostly from north-western India. The nearest records from this location are from Gujarat; near Diu and from Bhuj, Kachchh apart from Goa. Though noted from the neighbouring states of Gujarat and Goa, this species has never been reported from Maharashtra and this is the first record of Common Gull from Maharashtra. All previous records from India were of single birds and here we have two birds seen together with a potential third that occurred two months back.

We thank Hansel Pereira, Tanmayee Jadhav and Manasi Raut for joining us on the eventful birding session at Mamachiwadi. Special thanks to Prasad Ganpule and Ashwin Viswanathan for identification confirmation of the bird. We are grateful to the *Western Palearctic Gulls* Facebook Group and Lou Bertalan for help with subspecies identification.

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The Black-bellied Storm-Petrel *Fregetta tropica* from the Indian waters of Arabian Sea

Petrels, shearwaters and storm-petrels (Order: Procellariiformes) are truly pelagic birds spending most of their life at sea and only returning to land to breed. Most species are also highly migratory, following ocean currents and upwellings in search of food during the non-breeding season (Howell & Zufelt 2019; Harrison et al. 2021). Amongst these, the Black-bellied Storm-Petrel *Fregetta tropica* is plentiful in parts of the southern oceans, particularly in the southern Atlantic, but it does not appear to make a regular crossing through the tropical zone. In the southern Indian Ocean, this bird breeds on Kerguelen and Crozet Islands (Medrano & David 2023). During its non-breeding season, Black-bellied Storm-Petrels are highly pelagic birds, typically found close to or beyond the continental shelf, in deep waters (Harrison et al. 2021).

As a merchant navy professional, I have been sailing at sea for the past 25 years, and for the last ten years, I have developed a strong interest in birdwatching. During my time sailing in the Arabian Sea, I make an extra effort to look for seabirds. My first observation of a Black-bellied Storm-Petrel in the Arabian Sea was in the Omani waters on 21 July 2023, and on the same day I got pictures (Kumar 2023a, b). Two years later, I happened to be sailing in the Arabian Sea during the same month. However, my onward leg of the voyage from Sri Lanka to the Persian Gulf in the first week of July 2025 did not produce any Black-bellied Storm-Petrels. In contrast, during my return journey from the Persian Gulf to Singapore, the monsoon winds were at its peak. This resulted in strong southwest winds, rough seas, and waves up to 5m. To avoid the worst weather conditions, we planned our route closer to the Indian coast. The ship's course and the direction of the swell allowed me to continue birdwatching despite the rough seas. With the sea and swell hitting the ship's quarter rather than the bow, I was able to maintain a clear view forward.

My first sighting of a Black-bellied Storm-Petrel during this voyage was on the morning of 22 July 2025, when I saw an individual at about 160 nautical miles southeast of the Oman coast (Kumar 2025a). I was thrilled and hopeful that I might spot one within the Indian waters. My wish came true when I got first sighting in the Indian waters from *c.* 170 nautical miles off the Junagadh coast (18.983°N, 68.098°E), Gujarat on 23 July **[258]**. I followed it up with the first Black-bellied Storm-Petrels for Maharashtra on 24 July at *c.* 150 nautical miles off the Sindhudurg coast (16.351°N, 70.768°E) **[259]**. On the same day, I added the species to the Goa checklist when I got one *c.* 100 nautical miles off South Goa coast (14.808°N, 72.265°E) **[260]** and yet another soon afterwards. In summary, between 22 and 24 July 2025, I recorded a total of 51 different individuals in the northern Arabian Sea (Table 1, Fig. 1); taking extra to ensure no double counting. The large gaps between sightings occurred due to our transit through some areas during the night. While some of the sightings were as individuals or pairs, groups with a maximum of up to 13 individuals, especially *c.* 110 nautical miles off the Maharashtra coast, was recorded. All sightings and photographs were carefully catalogued in eBird (www.ebird.org) after the trip.

258. One of the two Black-bellied Storm-Petrels off the Junagadh coast in Gujarat is the first for India after 40 years.

259. Two Black-bellied Storm-Petrels off the Sindhudurg coast is the first for the Maharashtra State.

All photos: Sushil Kumar

260. A single Black-bellied Storm-Petrel off the Goa coast.

Table 1. Sighting details of Black-bellied Storm-Petrel in the northern Arabian Sea during the July 2025 voyage

No	Date	Coordinates	# Birds	State & Country
1	22 July	21.688°N, 62.443°E	1	A'Sharqiyah South, Oman
2	22 July	21.299°N, 63.229°E	4	A'Sharqiyah South, Oman
3	22 July	21.229°N, 63.390°E	7	High Seas
4	23 July	18.983°N, 68.098°E	2	Gujarat, India
5	23 July	18.648°N, 68.589°E	2	Gujarat, India
6	23 July	18.398°N, 68.902°E	10	Gujarat, India
7	24 July	16.351°N, 70.768°E	2	Maharashtra, India
8	24 July	15.906°N, 71.164°E	3	Maharashtra, India
9	24 July	15.490°N, 71.555°E	5	Maharashtra, India
10	24 July	15.445°N, 71.603°E	13	Maharashtra, India
11	24 July	14.808°N, 72.265°E	1	Goa, India
12	24 July	14.749°N, 72.345°E	1	Goa, India

Fig. 1. Map showing the records of Black-bellied Storm-Petrel during the voyage of July 2025. The sea-lane of the vessel is also marked.

I had no difficulties identifying Black-bellied Storm-Petrels as I was already familiar with the species. While they are predominantly black, they have a distinctive white band over the rump, as well as white on the undersides of the wings and flanks **[258–260]**. A broad black stripe runs down the center of the belly **[260]**, though it can sometimes be absent or broken. These birds are larger and bulkier than the more regular Wilson's Storm-Petrels *Oceanites oceanicus*, and they have long legs, which are visible beyond the tail during flight. The legs and feet are black. Black-bellied Storm-Petrels are often seen gliding just above the water's surface, holding their wings horizontally or at a 45° angle. They have a peculiar behaviour of kicking the water's surface with one foot while trailing the other behind, creating a visible wake **[261]**. This behaviour, along with their characteristic wake, makes identifying them relatively easy. Individuals seen were in various stages of wing moult **[260, 262–263]**. In addition to Black-bellied Storm-Petrels, I also observed other expected pelagic birds like the Flesh-footed Shearwaters *Ardenna carneipes*, Jouanin's Petrels *Bulweria fallax*, Wilson's Storm-Petrels, Masked Boobies *Sula dactylatra*, and Red-billed Tropicbirds *Phaethon aethereus* during this voyage.

261. Black-bellied Storm-Petrels often create a visible wake using their trailing foot.

262. A Black-bellied individual undergoing primary and secondary moult.

All photos: Sushil Kumar

263. A Black-bellied individual undergoing secondary moult.

South of Goa, we transitioned into night, and wind-speed decreased considerably as we came closer to the continental shelf. No further Black-bellied Storm-Petrels were seen further along the west coast of India but Wilson's Storm-Petrel numbers started to increase, particularly south of the Tamil Nadu coast. The persistent southwest winds of the monsoon season prevailed for weeks before our transit (Fig. 2). Winds toward the Indian coast were slightly weaker compared to those in the central Arabian Sea. The average weather conditions during this period were as follows: wind speeds of 30–40 knots, wave heights of 4 meters, and average swell heights of 3 meters. Currents varied, and the water depth ranged from 3,000m at deep sea to 200m closer to the shelf. The sea temperature was around 28°C. I believe that the favourable weather conditions played a significant role in allowing me to have such an incredible sighting of these storm-petrels. It may be mentioned that during my return voyage in September, I saw three Black-bellied Storm-Petrels in central Arabian Sea on 10 September 2025 (Kumar 2025).

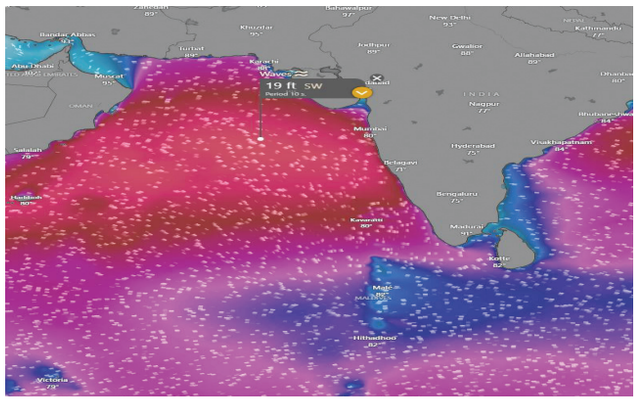

Fig. 2. Wind-speeds in Arabian Sea during the transit that shows rough weather conditions in central Arabian Sea.

For many decades, the only record of Black-bellied Storm-Petrel from the South Asian region was of a specimen from the 'Bay of Bengal' in the Natural History Museum, London (Gibson-Hill 1948); with some debate on the exact date of the record (Praveen et al. 2013). However, the first authentic record from South Asia is one caught about 14 miles south-east of Minicoy Island on 09 September 1960 (Bailey & Bourne 1963). There is another well-documented sight record of three birds from 250 km west-south-west of North Island, Lakshadweep on 20 June 1984 (van den Berg et al. 1991). Subsequently, there have been a few sight records from Sri Lanka as well (Praveen et al. 2013). My records are the first for India after a gap of 40 years and the first ones with photographs from South Asia.

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The White-eared Night Heron *Oroanassa magnifica* in Manas National Park: A new species for Assam, India

The White-eared Night Heron *Oroanassa magnifica* is an elusive nocturnal bird species of the family Ardeidae. It is primarily distributed in southern China and northern Vietnam, with scattered records from northern Laos (Pilgrim et al. 2009; Martínez-Vilalta et al. 2023). Known for its secretive behaviour, it inhabits dense subtropical and tropical moist lowland riverine forests and streams. With a global population suspected to be between 1,500 and 15,000 mature individuals, the species is classified as Near Threatened by the IUCN (BirdLife International 2025). Recent records have extended its known range in South Asia. It was first recorded from Bihar (Shafi et al. 2018) followed by multiple records in the Sundarbans, Bangladesh (Sadi et al. 2023), and more recently from the Namdapha National Park, Arunachal Pradesh (Hub Network 2025). Here, we document the first occurrence of the species in Assam, based on camera trap photographic evidence captured from the Manas National Park in February 2017.

The species was observed in Doimari area (26.787°N, 91.012°E) of the Manas National Park in the state of Assam in India along the Indo-Bhutan border (Fig. 1). As a part of 2016–2017 Annual Phase IV monitoring, two camera traps facing each other were deployed in a grid in Manas National Park. An individual of the species was captured on 09 February 2017, at 0009 h **[264]** and on 16 February 16 2017 at 0459 h **[265]** in the same location placed across a pebbled stream with stagnant pools of water. The area was characterized by semi-evergreen forest with riparian vegetation along the stream, at an elevation of approximately 138 m above sea level. The area was frequented by wildlife such as the Sambar *Rusa unicolor*, Barking Deer *Muntiacus vaginalis*, Gaur *Bos gaurus*, and Crab-eating Mongoose *Urva urva*.

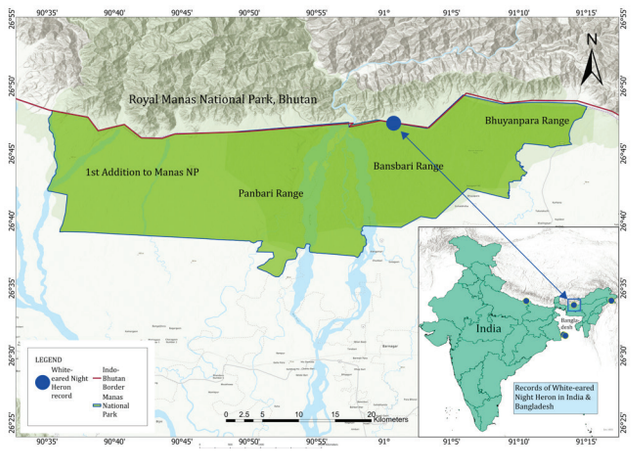

Fig 1. Site of White-eared Night Heron photographs and the distribution of other records in South Asia in relation to this site. Note, multiple Bangladesh records are shown as a single dot.

All photos: Trail cameras

264. The camera-trap photo of the juvenile White-eared Night Heron showing white spots on the wings.

265. Juvenile White-eared Night Heron showing white underparts, supercilium and blackish crown.

The camera trapping exercise, designed to monitor tigers, co-predators, and prey, under the Phase IV of All India Tiger Estimation, primarily focused on these species, which was a major reason for the 'bycatch' species being overlooked. Furthermore, while all photo-captured species are segregated, the two images of this species, captured at close range, were partially overexposed, initially making species identification difficult. In fact, when this photograph was made, this White-eared Night Heron was not in our radar as the 2016 report from Bihar was published only in 2018 (Shafi et al. 2018). In 2025, a detailed analysis of bird photos was done. Our photos showed a prominent white band across large eyes, a short, black crest, and short bill; wings were black-brown, marked with white spots along feather tips; tail was short and black. The bird had a stocky body and relatively short yellow legs. All these confirmed the species as a juvenile White-eared Night Heron and not a juvenile Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* (Brazil 2009). The identification was also validated through independent reviews (Arpit Deomurari and Nilutpal Mahanta *pers. comm.*, in August 2025). This constitutes the first confirmed record of the White-eared Night Heron in Assam, India (Choudhury 2000; eBird 2025).

The recent reports of White-eared Night Heron from the foothills of Himalaya, in Bihar, Assam, and Arunachal Pradesh, indicates that the species' preferred microhabitat and ecological conditions remain intact in this zone. Hence the species' actual distribution may be significantly wider than previously assumed, potentially encompassing other underexplored, forested riparian zones of eastern and north-eastern India highlighting the need for targeted survey methods to assess its distribution and ecology.

We are grateful to the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (PCCF) & Chief Wildlife Warden, Assam Forest Department, Mr. Ravi Singh, SG & CEO, Dr. Sejal Worah, Dr. Dipankar Ghose, and Mr. Yash Magan Shethia from WWF-India for their support. We thank Dr Arpit Deomurari and Dr Nilutpal Mahanta for confirming the species identification. We are also appreciative to Mr. Bipul Ch. Nath and Mr. Sandey Daimary. We also acknowledge the Discovery CAT and WWF network for their support to carry out the study.

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Coprophagy in Little Stint *Calidris minuta*, at Mamachiwadi beach, Maharashtra, India

Coprophagy is the behaviour of consuming faeces, and includes the consumption of faeces of other species (heterospecific coprophagy), or consumption of faeces of other individuals of the same species (allocoprophagy), or consumption of one's own faeces (autocoprophagy) (Hirakawa 2001). It is observed in various animal groups, including mammals, insects, and even some birds (Hurd et al. 1991; Soave & Brand 1991). The diet of Little Stint *Calidris minuta* consists mostly of invertebrates (del Hoyo et al. 1996; Snow & Perrins 1997). However, heterospecific coprophagy and allocoprophagy are sometimes considered non-feeding behaviours that inoculate the gut with microbes found in other individuals (Engel & Moran 2013).

On 16 April 2024, we visited Mamachiwadi beach (19.476°N, 72.755°E; 20 m asl), in Palghar District, Maharashtra, to observe migratory birds. At 0745 h, we noticed that the tide had receded and saw a few people defecating on the beach in the open. At the same time, we observed three Little Stints feeding on human faecal matter lying on the beach. While watching these long-distance migrants feeding on human excrement was unpleasant, we photographed the feeding behaviour for record purposes. The birds repeatedly approached the spot and fed on the waste. It is unclear to us whether the birds were feeding on the actual faeces or insects there in. We could not find any literature on Little Stint engaging in coprophagy, however, it has previously been documented in Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres* (Kasambe & Kasambe 2022). Hence, our report of Little Stint engaging in coprophagy is an important addition to its diet and foraging behaviours during migration.

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A Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* x Northern Pintail *Anas acuta* hybrid at Sultanpur National Park, Haryana, India

In a thrilling encounter, the authors were fortunate to witness a rare hybrid of the Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* x Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*, at Sultanpur National Park, a designated Ramsar site in Haryana, India on 12 January 2025 **[266]**. On the morning of our visit, we spotted a single male Mallard x Northern Pintail hybrid foraging among a flock of Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra*, Gadwall *Mareca strepera*, Northern Pintail, and Northern Shoveler *Spatula clypeata*. The bird was photographed with a female Northern Pintail **[267]**. It was interesting to note that we did not observe even a single Mallard in the wetland at this time.

The individual displayed morphological features of the two species: The green head of the Mallard but not as bright and distinctive, and greyish-blue pointed tail feathers like the Northern Pintail, and showed a triangular white patch on the neck, and mottled brown and grey body, with a dark grey bill, long and pointed, resembling that of a Northern Pintail. The Mallard x Northern Pintail hybrid is an uncommon occurrence in the wild (Gunter 1941; Sharpe & Johnsgard 1966; Clark et al. 2020), resulting from the cross-breeding of the two species, and this often happens where habitat of both species overlap during breeding seasons or mating time (Guay et al. 2014). However,

Jagdeep Singh

266. Mallard x Northern Pintail hybrid at Sultanpur National Park.

Photo: Jagdeep Singh

267. Mallard x Northern Pintail hybrid with a female Northern Pintail.

sightings of such hybrids are comparatively scarce in India, especially on the non-breeding grounds during the non-breeding season, which makes our encounter worth documenting.

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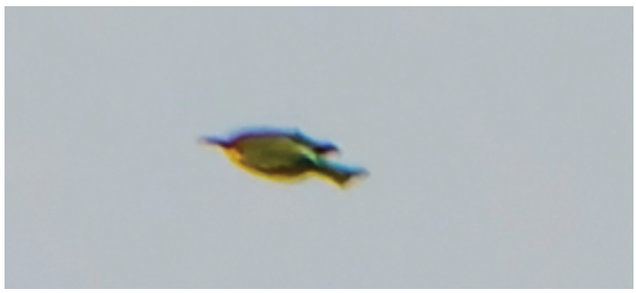
The Chestnut-headed Bee-eater *Merops leschenaulti* in western Maharashtra, and notes on its movements in the Indian peninsula

The Chestnut-headed Bee-eater *Merops leschenaulti* is widely distributed from South Asia through Southeast Asia to Indonesia (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012; Fry & Kirwan 2020). In India, it breeds in the Himalayan foothills from Himachal Pradesh through Uttarakhand to Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, the hills of north-eastern India, the hills of the northern Eastern Ghats and eastern Central India, the Western Ghats south of southern Maharashtra, and the Andaman Islands.

On 29 November 2023, at 1723 h, we recorded a Chestnut-headed Bee-eater at Vetal Hill, Pune, Maharashtra (18.527°N, 73.815°E). A distinct call was first detected above the tree canopy, and comparison with Xeno-canto recordings (https://xeno-canto.org/species/Merops-leschenaulti) confirmed it as a Chestnut-headed Bee-eater. We followed the call to a savanna patch on the hill, where 25 Green Bee-eaters *M. orientalis* were observed flying overhead. Shortly afterwards, a solitary bee-eater was seen flying high, showing a rusty-colored head, yellow cheeks and throat, turquoise rump, and no tail-streamers **[268, 269]**. These features, combined with its vocalization, confirmed the bird as a Chestnut-headed Bee-eater. Records from western India, outside the Western Ghats, are few, with only two historical reports—one from Mumbai on 30 August 1978 and another from Gujarat on 5 June 1981 (Kannan & Bertrand 1980; Monga 1983).

268. Chestnut-headed Bee-eater showing no tail projections.



Both photos: Siddhant Mhetre

269. Chestnut-headed Bee-eater showing rusty cap and yellow throat.

While the breeding distribution of Chestnut-headed Bee-eater is fairly well understood, there are substantial gaps in our understanding of their non-breeding movements and distribution (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012; Praveen 2025). It is described as largely resident, though several populations show regional movements linked to rainfall and breeding. It is a summer visitor to the Himalayan foothills from Uttarakhand through Arunachal Pradesh and Assam, where it breeds between February and June before withdrawing from much of its northern range in winter (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). The species also emigrates from high-rainfall areas during the monsoon months (June–October) and occurs widely but locally across the submontane tracts of the Himalaya, north-eastern India, and the Western Ghats south of Goa (Ali & Ripley 1983). Field guides describe it as resident and partially migratory across the Himalaya, north-eastern India, and the Western and Eastern Ghats, extending to Sri Lanka (Grimmett et al. 2016). However, these sources provide little insight into where Himalayan birds move after breeding or how northern and peninsular populations are connected.

This record prompted a closer examination of the Chestnut-headed Bee-eater's movements across India. We use district aggregation to denote three regions: Himalaya (till Sikkim), Western Ghats and North-eastern Ghats. The large number of districts in the Peninsular India that do not belong to the two Ghats was designated as Central India & Peninsular Plains. We used district-wise eBird bar charts (eBird 2025) for India and Nepal and calculated reporting frequency of complete checklists in each of the four regions (Fig. 1). Clearly, the Chestnut-headed Bee-eater population in the Himalaya are largely migratory although their exact wintering destinations remain uncertain. The North-eastern Ghats may hold a small

resident population but also receive a winter influx, and this likely from the Himalaya. The Western Ghats population appears mostly resident, though occasional southward movement of Himalayan individuals to Western Ghats cannot be ruled out, especially given scattered records from Central India and the Peninsular Plains. Compared to other regions, there are very few records from the large part of Central India and Peninsular plains. However, a small peak in February-March and an even smaller peak in October-November indicate that this region receives some influx during both spring and autumn passage. The Pune individual in November was probably on southward passage from the Himalaya, adding to the scarce records from western India outside the Western Ghats.

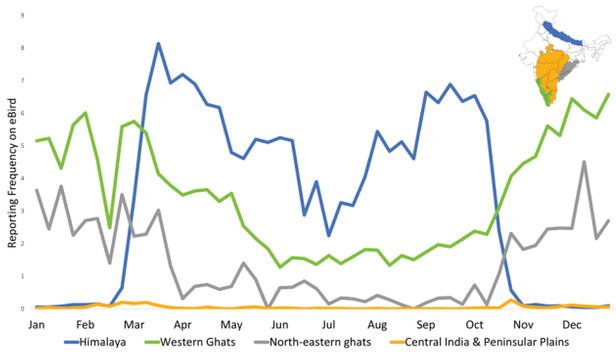


Fig. 1 Reporting frequency of Chestnut-headed Bee-eaters using eBird bar charts for India and Nepal in four regions (see inset map) in Indian subcontinent.

Together, these patterns suggest three breeding populations—Himalaya, Western Ghats, and a much smaller one in North-eastern Ghats—and a broad passage zone across central and southern India that are likely to be migrants from the Himalayan population. In fact, a substantial portion of the Himalayan population may likely be wintering in North-eastern Ghats. This needs further investigation through satellite telemetry.

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The Lanceolated Warbler *Locustella lanceolata* from Debrigarh Wildlife Sanctuary: An addition to the avifauna of Odisha, India

On 06 January 2025, at 0819 h, a warbler was photographed by BP near Launsara village on the fringes of Hirakud reservoir inside Debrigarh Wildlife Sanctuary (21.499°N, 83.771°E; 200 m asl). The bird was seen in reed beds at about 1 m above the ground and was extremely shy and skulking. BP managed to take a few photographs and videos before the bird flew back into the reed beds and did not emerge again despite waiting for about 20 min (Patra 2025). During this period the bird could not be seen moving inside in the reeds. From the photographs, it could be ascertained that the bird was a *Locustella* spp., and was later confirmed as Lanceolated Warbler *Locustella lanceolata*, based on the following morphological features **[270–272]**, such as, a lance-headed (tapering head, flattened forehead) shape of the head, and did not show a rounded head in any posture, unlike Grasshopper Warbler *L. naevia*, or Rusty-rumped Warbler *Helopsaltes certhiola*. The black stripes formed the visible 'braces' on the back, and also showed streaking on the underparts to the throat. A juvenile Rusty-rumped Warbler may have scattered streaking on the underparts, mostly restricted to its flanks. A lack of white-tipped tail rectrices differentiates it from Rusty-rumped Warbler, whose tail tips are always white (Grimmett et al. 2011).

The Lanceolated Warbler is the smallest and most extensively marked *Locustella* warbler. It breeds across a wide area from northeastern Russia eastward through the Palearctic to northern Japan. It is a long-distance migrant, with its non-breeding range extending from the north-eastern parts of the Indian Subcontinent, eastwards to Myanmar, Vietnam and northern Philippines, southwards to the Malayan Peninsula and Sumatra, North Borneo, and western Java in Indonesia (Pearson 2024). While records from Southeast Asia and from the Andaman and Nicobar Islands in India are regular (eBird 2025), the Lanceolated Warbler has been reported very sporadically from mainland India in the last few years, with many gaps in the understanding of its distribution in South Asia. The species remains poorly documented, probably owing to its secretive and skulking behaviour, and the difficulty in correctly identifying it without high-quality photographs.

The nearest records of the species from Odisha are from Baruipur marshes, South 24 Paraganas District, West Bengal from February–March 2022, documented in a detailed account of various confirmed and unconfirmed historical records with specimens, such as, those from Meghalaya and Etawah, Uttar Pradesh, including some tentative records that were rejected (Chattopadhyay 2023). Subsequently, there have been many records of the species from multiple locations in Baruipur marshes every year since 2022, between November and March (eBird 2025), suggesting that it may likely be a regular wintering ground for the species. Outside of South 24 Paraganas District, the species has been reported in Birbhum District (Saha 2021). It has now been confirmed from Assam (see elsewhere in this issue). There are records from Bangladesh as well, from Dhaka (Titu 2022) and Sylhet (Rare Birds Bangladesh 2010). On the western coast of India, it has been reported in September from Nalsarovar in Ahmedabad District, Gujarat (Kshirsagar 2025). Baker (1924) stated it was rare beyond eastern Odisha and Bengal, however, there were no confirmed records from Odisha till now, making the record from Debrigarh Wildlife Sanctuary an addition to the avifauna of the State. The species was not reported in subsequent explorations of the same habitat, due to which we refrain from

speculating if it was wintering in this habitat. Further explorations of similar and suitable habitats in Odisha (and eastern India) in the winter months would help in further understanding the distribution, behaviour and ecology of this species.

270. Lanceolated Warbler from Debrigarh Wildlife Sanctuary.

271. Lanceolated Warbler from Debrigarh Wildlife Sanctuary.

All photos: Bhubaneswar Patra

272. Lanceolated Warbler from Debrigarh Wildlife Sanctuary.

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The Great Frigatebird *Fregata minor:* an addition to the avifauna of Goa

The Great Frigatebird is a large, widespread seabird that rarely lands on water and roosts on trees (Grimmett et al. 2011). In flight, it can perform deft maneuvers and soar for extended periods of time, making just sporadic deep wingbeats (Grimmett et al. 2011). They occasionally scavenge around boats and are known to aggressively pursue other seabirds, such as boobies, to force them to regurgitate or release food, like fish, and then catch the food mid-air. They also capture their own prey by plunging steeply into the water (Grimmett et al. 2011; Gauger & Schreiber 2020). The Great Frigatebird exhibits remarkable variation in its post-breeding migratory patterns. Birds from Europa Island, located between Mozambique and Madagascar, undertake long-distance journeys to roosting sites across the Indian Ocean, and population numbers at any given site can fluctuate depending on oceanic conditions and the availability of suitable roosting islands (Weimerskirch et al. 2017).

On 28 July 2024, SF organized a bird-watching trip to Fort Aguada, situated in Bardez Taluka of North Goa District (15.490°N, 73.760°E) (Fig. 1). Standing on Sinquerim Beach, with a view of the Arabian Sea, Fort Aguada is a well-preserved 17th-century Portuguese fort that also features a lighthouse. It is designated as a Monument of National Importance by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI). A small group of enthusiastic birdwatchers assembled on the lower ramparts of Fort Aguada at 0800 h and began bird watching. Expected species such as Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*, Bridled Tern *Onychoprion anaethetus*, Great Crested Tern *Thalasseus bergii*, White-bellied Sea-Eagle *Icthyophaga leucogaster,* and Brahminy Kite *Haliastur indus* were observed. Suddenly, a Pterodactyl-like silhouette was observed in flight. It was entirely black with a reddish throat pouch, suggesting the bird was a male. It had a deeply forked tail, which appeared pointed when folded, narrow, curved wings, and a distinct crooked beak. Photographs were immediately taken, and it was identified as a Great Frigatebird **[273]**.

Fig 1. Location of record (Aguada Fort).

Savio Fonseca

273. A male Great Frigatebird from Aguada Fort.

Each year, during the southwest monsoon, sight records of small numbers of Lesser Frigatebird *F. ariel* and Great Frigatebird are reported from the shores of India (Karuthedathu et al. 2015). Strong monsoon wind blowing towards land is thought to be responsible for most of these accounts (Sashikumar et al. 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). According to eBird (2025), the Great Frigatebird has been recorded in recent years from only three states in India other than Goa: Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and West Bengal. The most records (nine) occurred in Kerala, followed by two in Tamil Nadu. West Bengal has one record. Most sightings were in June and July (four in each month), followed by May, August, October, November, and December (with one each). Historical records from Maharashtra are listed in Prasad (2003, 2006).

From Goa, there have been two sight records close to land with no photographs: a female by Heinz Lainer at Anjuna on 16 September 1990 and a juvenile by David Stanton over Anjuna-Baga on 21 August 2008 (Lainer & Alvares 2013). Additionally, a juvenile frigatebird (probably a Great Frigatebird) was reported by Prasad (2004) near Aguada Fort during a sea-watching trip on 27 October 2003. This species was added as a seabird of Goa by Baidya et al. (2017) but was excluded from the checklist of birds of Goa (Baidya & Bhagat 2018, 2024) due to a lack of confirmed documentation. Hence, the present sighting, with photographic evidence, qualifies as the first confirmed record in Goa.

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The Long-billed Pipit *Anthus similis*: Rediscovery and a case study of a lost pipit from West Bengal

A large pipit with pale brown colouring, a relatively long bill, and an extended tail was first observed on 21 December 2023 at the Dholburu Hills (23.255°N, 86.231°E; *c.*981 m asl) of Purulia district, West Bengal by SP and four others during a bird watching trip. The pipit was seen among Paddyfield Pipit *Anthus rufulus*, Tree Pipit *A. trivialis*, and Blyth's Pipit *A. godlewskii*. It was identified as a Long-billed Pipit *A. similis* based on its pale rufous underparts, long narrow buff supercilium, longer tail, and minimal upper part streaking. The last recorded sighting of this individual occurred on 11 March 2024 (Mukhopadhyay 2024) at Gojaburu Hills near Tenyasi. It was noted foraging with other pipits, primarily consuming insects and small arthropods. Sightings in the area took place regularly between 0800 hrs in the morning and 1645 hrs in the evening.

The species was observed again on 29 November 2024 at 1230 h in the same area. It was identified as a Long-billed Pipit by its similar physical traits, though this individual had heavier streaking on the upper parts. It was seen with Indian Bushlark *Plocealauda erythroptera*, Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark *Eremopterix griseu*, and Indian Robin *Copsychus fulicatus*. The individual was sighted only once for a few hours.

The individual observed on 21 December 2023 displayed upperparts largely grey and free of significant streaking, while the underparts showed uniform rufous tones. Overall, the bird appeared pale brown, with a lightly streaked head and an unstreaked back **[276]**. A narrow, elongated buff supercilium and a distinct black loral stripe were evident **[274]**. The throat appeared faintly white, and the ear-coverts were more rufous than the surrounding plumage. Rufous fringes were also visible on the undertail coverts and tertials. The hind claw was distinctly decurved **[275]**. These features collectively indicated that the bird was likely of the *jerdoni* subspecies, giving it a notably thrush-like appearance.

In contrast, the individual recorded on 29 November 2024 exhibited even stronger diagnostic features of the *jerdoni* subspecies. Its underparts were markedly more rufous than those of the 2023 bird, and the breast showed more pronounced streaking. The whitish throat was clearer, and both the buff supercilium and black loral stripe were more prominent **[277]**. This bird also possessed rufous ear-coverts and a faint but visible malar stripe.

Arka Karmakar

274. Long-billed Pipit, photographed on 25 December 2023.

Arka Karmakar

275. Long-billed Pipit photographed on 25 December 2023.

Subhra Pakhira

276. Long-billed Pipit photographed by Rajib Chakraborty on 25 December 2023.

Subhra Pakhira

277. Long-billed Pipit photographed by Arun Goswami on 29 November 2024.

The Long-billed Pipit has been frequently reported in previous ornithological records from the state of West Bengal. Earlier documented occurrences available to the authors are summarized in Table 1.

The sightings reported here are the easternmost records of Long-billed Pipit from India in recent years. Historically, there are more records from eastern patches of West Bengal, but recent trends have indicated that it is largely a winter migrant to the western and central parts of the country (SoIB 2023). The easternmost record of Long-billed Pipit in the Indian subcontinent lies to the east of this record at Premtoli (24.230°N, 88.241°E) in Rajshahi Bibhag, Bangladesh preceding this record on 23 February 2022 (Anam 2022). In India, the previous easternmost record is on 13 January 2019 from Mohrenga (21.416°N, 81.882°E), Chhattisgarh (Verma 2019) while one has been sighted in Pusu Hills (23.320°N, 85.164°E), Jharkhand on 2 March 2025 (Saquib 2025). The sighting from 2023 is the first record in 54 years from the state of West Bengal after the record from Anderson Weir in 1969. The 2023 and 2024 records are also the only photographic evidence of the species from the state. Few of the historical records have mentioned about the presence of photographs but there are no records of those photographs being published.

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Table 1. Historical records of Long-billed Pipit from West Bengal

Place	Reference	Date	Remarks
Erstwhile Jalpaiguri District of Bengal Presidency	Inglis et al. (2020)	NA	Identified as species number 844 and note as being recorded as far as Sikkim Terai.
Shore of Panchet Reservoir	Gauntlett (1985)	February 1968	Almost unmarked pipit lacking the dark row of covert spots unlike Tawny Pipit. Photograph taken but not published.
Anderson Weir near Durgapur Barrage	Gauntlett (1985)	19 February 1969	Had the same identifying features as the individual of February 1968. Photograph taken but not published. Anderson Weir at present, is a fallow stretch of land on the eastern bank of the Durgapur Barrage according to the sketch map of the Durgapur area provided in the book. That particular name does not exist anymore.
Northern Bengal	Ali & Ripley (1998)	NA	The subspecies *jerdoni* is mentioned as a winter migrant to the eastern part of the country including present day West Bengal.
Northern West Bengal	Home (1973)	NA	NA

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Observation of facial lesions in an Oriental Turtle Dove *Streptopelia orientalis*

An adult *Oriental Turtle Dove Streptopelia orientalis* was observed with noticeable facial lesions on 17 February 2025 during a routine avifaunal survey at Govindgarh Dam (26.430°N, 74.377°E), Ajmer, the site of the Luni River's origin in Rajasthan. The individual was perched on a wire near farmlands and showed no abnormal behavior. However, visible abnormalities around the cere and beak raised suspicion of a possible disease condition.

Close-up photographs **[278]** revealed prominent, crusted nodules on the upper and lower mandibles and cere. The morphology of these lesions suggests a cutaneous manifestation of avian pox, an infection caused by the *Avipoxvirus*. This virus affects numerous avian taxa worldwide (Williams et al. 2021), typically producing proliferative sores on unfeathered skin regions.

Rounak Choudhary

278. Oriental Turtle Dove displaying raised, crusted lesions on the mandible and cere.

Although avian pox remains the most probable diagnosis based on external characteristics, other potential causes should be considered. Trichomoniasis, caused by *Trichomonas gallinae*, produces caseous lesions in the crop and oral cavity that may extend externally to the beak (Stabler 1954). Ectoparasitic infections caused by *Knemidocoptes* mites can also lead to crusty growth around the beak, although these are usually accompanied by generalized skin thickening (Wade 2006). Neoplastic growth, while rare in wild birds, cannot be completely excluded (Zehnder et al. 2016). Based on the lesion's appearance and location, avian pox remains the most plausible cause, followed by trichomoniasis or mite infestation. Nevertheless, the precise etiology remains uncertain in the absence of clinical examination or histopathological confirmation.

Cutaneous avian pox lesions have previously been recorded in Rock Pigeon *Columba livia* (Hibl et al. 2019), Mourning Dove *Zenaida macroura* (Pledger 2005), and Speckled Pigeon *Columba guinea* (Bwala et al. 2015). Such lesions are typically wart-like and occur in unfeathered areas including the eyelids, cere, legs, and perioral regions. In India, *Avipoxvirus* infection has been reported in several species of wild birds (Pawar et al. 2011). Transmission of avian pox occurs both through direct contact between birds and via mechanical vectors, notably mosquitoes (Greenacre 2005).

This observation may represent an isolated incident. However, consistent monitoring of visible abnormalities in free-ranging bird populations, supplemented by citizen science initiatives that screen publicly shared photographs for disease symptoms, could serve as an effective early-warning system for tracking disease dynamics in avifauna, particularly in regions where wildlife increasingly interfaces with human-altered landscapes.

We are grateful to veterinary professionals Bhanu Pratap and Kalpana Rathore for their valuable insights on differential diagnosis and possible pathological conditions.

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The Black-browed Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus bistrigiceps* and Lanceolated Wabler *Locustella lanceolata* from Majuli Island, Assam, India

The Majuli Island (26.966°N, 94.173°E; *c.*84 m asl) in the Brahmaputra River, located in the Majuli District in Assam, India, is one of the largest river islands in the world. It comprises a large riverine island with innumerable small islets, locally called 'chapori', and is surrounded by the Brahmaputra River in the south and Subansiri and Kherkatia Xuti rivers in the north. It has been designated as an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA) in 2004 and as a Biodiversity Heritage Site (BHS) in 2017 (Islam & Rahmani 2004; Assam State Biodiversity Board 2017). The topography of the area is flat floodplain with lakes (beels) and marshes on the one hand and anthropogenic structures such as embankments and roads on the other; it has over 155 small, medium, and large wetlands, and about 20 islets surround the mainland which contain large tracts of riparian grasslands and few riparian forests and which support high avian diversity (Bordoloi & Hazarika 2015; BirdLife International 2025). In this note, we document the sightings of two species from Majuli Island, Assam, both scare winter visitors to India: Black-browed Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus bistrigiceps* and Lanceolated Wabler *Locustella lanceolata*.

Black-browed Reed Warbler

On 22 December 2024, at approximately 1555 h, a Black-browed Reed Warbler (BBRW, hereinafter) was spotted at the edge of the Vereki Beel (26.932°N, 94.138°E; *c.*100 m asl), a local wetland dominated by Water Hyacinth *Pontederia crassipes.* While watching a Rusty-rumped Warbler *Helopsaltes certhiola*, an unfamiliar bird was briefly seen perched on Water Hyacinth leaves feeding on small insects, before it retreated into cover. It appeared in sight again after 5–10 sec on top of the Water Hyacinth plants in the open. It was initially misidentified as a Paddyfield Warbler *A. agricola,* but was apparently less warmly coloured in comparison. When observed with binoculars, it was noted that the bird showed a pale supercilium and prominent blackish lateral crown-stripes, the latter feature notably stronger than that of other *Acrocephlus* spp. in the area. It was photographed and identified as a Black-browed Reed Warbler **[279]**. The bird was constantly vocalising while foraging with a *trrrrrt-trrrrrt* call, somewhat like an Aberrant Bush Warbler *Horornis flavolivaceus.* Two more individuals of BBRW were seen in the same patch, and all birds mostly preferred the edges of the wetlands.

BBRW breeds in south-eastern Russia, adjacent north-eastern China, eastern Mongolia, and northern Japan; and winters from parts of north-eastern India and Bangladesh, east to southern and south-eastern China, south to Malay Peninsula and much of Southeast Asia (Dyrcz 2020). In India, BBRW is reported from southern West Bengal, eastern Jharkhand, Manipur, and Assam, along with a historical record from Ladakh (eBird 2025a). In Assam, the species has been regularly reported from the following Districts: Kamrup Metropolitan, Morigaon, Nagaon, and Tinsukia, along with a very recent report from Jorhat District (eBird 2025b). Though our record is not unexpected, there are no previous records of the species from Majuli Island, Assam.

Lanceolated Wabler

In a large patch of grassland dominated by *Phragmites karka* in the Bongaon area (26.952°N, 94.284°E; *c.*110 m asl) of Majuli Island, bordered by fallow fields, overrun with *Xanthium strumarium*

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279. Black-browed Reed Warbler perched on *Pontederia crassipes*, dated 22 December 2024.

and interspersed with *Ipomoea carnea*, a Lanceolated Warbler (LAWA, hereinafter) was encountered on 26 March 2025 **[280]**. At around 1500 h, playback of the song of Lanceolated Warbler song was used at several sites of the area to detect its presence. Initially, a few Spotted Bush Warbler *L. thoracica* and Baikal Bush warbler *L. davidi* responded to the song with the typical *tchek tchek* call that is usually given by *Locutella* warblers in the non-breeding season. However, at around 1530 h, a different vocal response was heard from an *Ipomoea* spp. patch surrounded by *Xanthium* spp. tracts. Compared to the call of the other *Locustella* spp., this call sounded faster and shorter. The bird was briefly seen calling and hopping around in the ground among dense bushes. When observed with the binoculars, clear streaks on the upperparts of the bird were visible, which gave an impression of a miniature Bristled Grassbird *Schoenicola striatus*. Later, it was observed that the streaks on the back of the bird extended to the sides and the chest, a feature which ruled out the Grasshopper Warbler *L. naevia*. During subsequent playbacks, the bird responded with a much faster and shorter burst of *tchek-tchek tchek-tchek* call ending in a slower pace lasting less than 3 sec, which may probably serve as its alarm call (Chattopadhyay 2023). This was found to be a diagnostic call of the species during our observation. Six more individuals were found on 30 March 2025 in the *Phragmites* spp. patches of the area, mostly preferring the edges.

LAWA breeds across a wide range from north-eastern Europe east through Russia, parts of Mongolia and north-eastern China,

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280. Lanceolated Warbler perched on *Ipomoea carnea*, dated 30 March 2025.

east to northern parts of Japan; and it winters in north-eastern parts India, Bangladesh and parts of Southeast Asia (Pearson 2024). In mainland India, the species has been recorded recently from Gujarat (eBird 2025a) and northern Odisha (see elsewhere in this issue); but its status in these regions remains unclear.

Our record of the species from Bongaon area of Majuli Island in March 2025, along with previous records of the species from Maguri Beel in Tinsukia District, Assam, dated March 2019 (Sen 2019) and December 2022 (Pratim 2022), suggests that the species is likely to be wintering in suitable habitats in Assam. Moreover, the species has been regularly recorded from parts of Bangladesh during winter season (during December and February) (eBird 2025a). This also suggests that the species probably has a more widespread range in winter than is currently known.

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A Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla* from Sikkim, India

On 12 April 2024 at 0840 h, a Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla* was photographed near the Old Silk Route view point at Zuluk, eastern Sikkim. The location was moderately crowded with tourists, and the weather was cold but pleasant following light snowfall the previous night. The bird was located after following its distinctive high-pitched *tsi-tsi-tsi* call. It was perched on a *Salix* tree near a mountain cliff (27.257°N, 88.787°E; *c.*3000 m asl). Key field features included a blackish head and crown, orange breast extending to the flanks, black, white, and orange streaks on back and wings, prominent white wing bars, pale belly, and a yellowish conical bill with grey tip **[281]**. The identification was confirmed using Rasmussen & Anderton (2012).

This is the first photographic record of the species from Sikkim. It has not been listed in Stevens (1923), Acharya & Vijayan (2011), or Chettri et al. (2021). No records were found on eBird also.

Arindam Sinha

281. Brambling photographed from Zuluk, Sikkim, India.

The Brambling breeds in northern and north-eastern Europe, eastwards to eastern Russia (Chukotka), south to north-eastern Kazakhstan, central and south-eastern Altai, Tuva, southern Lake Baikal region and winters in west, central, and southern Europe, northern Africa, the Middle East, and south-western, central, and eastern Asia (Clement & Arkhipov 2020). In India, the bird has been reported from Gilgit, Ladakh, Jammu & Kashmir, and Himachal Pradesh; sporadically to Uttarakhand and Arunachal Pradesh and one record from Delhi region (Praveen 2025). The closest confirmed records of the species from the present sighting are from Darjeeling District, West Bengal, where the species has been documented on at least six occasions between 2021–2024 (Rana 2021; Subba 2023; Beck 2024; Dey 2024; Mitra 2024; Syangbo 2024).

It remains unclear whether the present individual is a vagrant or represents a part of a small overlooked migratory population in the Sikkim-Darjeeling region. Systematic surveys and long-term monitoring in the region would help clarify its status.

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A Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla* from Junagadh, Gujarat

The Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla* breeds from northern Scandinavia, eastwards through northern Russia and Siberia till the coasts of the Pacific in Russia (Copete 2020). In the non-breeding season, it is found in eastern Nepal, north-eastern India, northern and central Myanmar, northern Thailand, northern Laos, northern Vietnam, southern China, and Taiwan (Copete 2020). Vagrancy of the species has been well documented, and 2024–2025 has been an exceptional season for Little Bunting in India with first records from the states of Tripura, Jharkhand, Haryana, and Rajasthan recorded (Chakrabarti et al. 2025). We add to this list with our record from the state of Gujarat.

On 28 March 2025 at 0645 h, while birding in the premises of our lodge, Aramness (21.155°N, 70.557°E) in Junagadh, Gujarat, we saw a small bird that flew in and perched on a lemon tree. We managed to photograph it **[282]** before it disappeared within less than 15-20 sec. Later, almost every day, till our return on 03 April 2025, we managed to get photographs of this particular bird. Photographs showed a bunting with a black crown with reddish brown head stripe, chestnut ear-coverts, dark eye-stripe behind the eye curving downwards to surround the ear-coverts, dark moustachial stripe connecting to the breast streaking and pale eye-ring. The upperparts showed a grey-brown rump lightly streaked black, and a mantle with heavy black streaking. The median coverts were tipped buff-white, creating a wing-bar. The underparts were buff-white with narrow, distinct black streaking on breast and flank. We compared our photographs with our field guide (Grimmett et al. 2011) and found out that it is a Little Bunting. As this was a lifer for us, we reverified the identification with others and obtained confirmation as to this species (Pravar Mourya, *in litt.* 28 March 2025).

Narendran M. M.

282. Little Bunting showing chestnut ear-coverts, dark eye-stripe behind the eye curving downwards to surround the ear-coverts, dark moustachial stripe, and streaked breast.

Our sighting constituted the first photographic record of Little Bunting for the state of Gujarat, India. A pair of Little Buntings has been reported from Jasdan near Rajkot, Gujarat but further identification details were not documented (Khacher 1996). This has been the evidence used to list the species in Gujarat (Ganpule 2016; Ganpule et al. 2022). Ours will be the first independently verifiable evidence of its occurrence in the state. The habitat of the area where the bird was spotted was an agricultural land, currently used as organic garden of the Aramness resort. This habitat contains small stretches of Mango *Mangifera* sp., Lemon *Citrus* sp., Sapota *Malinkara zapota*, Sitafol *Annona squamosa*, Indian Jujube *Ziziphus mauritiana*, and Teak *Tectona grandis* amongst other grasses and shrubs.

We would like to thank Mr. Pravar Mourya for helping us to reconfirm the identification the Little Bunting. We would also like to thank Mr. Jimmy Patel and Mr. Parikshit Rathore for encouraging us continuously and giving permission to do birding inside the lodge premises.

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Wall-making behaviour by a Blue-bearded Bee-eater *Nyctyornis athertoni* nestling

The family Meropidae comprises 31 species of bee-eaters, distributed across three genera in the Old World (Winkler et al. 2020). The genus *Nyctyornis* is represented by two species; the Red-bearded Bee-eater *N. amictus* and the Blue-bearded Bee-eater *N. athertoni*. The Blue-bearded Bee-eater is the largest of all bee-eaters, characterized by its predominantly green plumage and distinctive beard-like blue throat feathers. It is a resident of secondary evergreen and moist deciduous forests in the Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia (Ali & Ripley 1987; Praveen 2025). Blue-bearded Bee-eaters are cavity nesters that excavate nest tunnels in vertical banks (Ali & Ripley 1987). In this note I report a hitherto unrecorded instance of wall-making behaviour by a Blue-bearded Bee-eater's nestling in a nest tunnel, an apparent anti-predatory behavior, observed in Oros, Sindhudurg district, Maharashtra, India. This behaviour occurred daily during the feeding season, with wall construction at dusk and dismantling at dawn, using its bill as the primary tool.

I opportunistically observed a Blue-bearded Bee-eater nesting site in Oros village (16.107°N, 73.697°E), Sindhudurg district, Maharashtra. I made my observations during the period

of February to May 2025, which also coincided with the breeding season of the species (Ali & Ripley 1987). The surrounding habitat consisted of moist deciduous forest (Kulkarni 1988), dominated by trees like Khair *Senegalia catechu*, Charoli *Buchanania lanzan*, and Akashi *Acacia auriculiformis*. The nest (or the nesting tunnel) had an oval entrance and was found dug into a vertical exposed red soil bank alongside a road. The nest tunnel was *c.* 115 cm above ground level, with an oval entrance measuring 8 cm wide and 10 cm high and extended *c.* 115 cm in depth. I repeatedly observed birds on their lookout perch, which was 15 m away from the nest and 4 m above ground level on a tree. The nest was 8 m away from the road. I took all these measurements post-fledging to avoid disturbance to the nest.

I followed recommended practices and guidelines in Barve et al. (2020) for documentation of the nest observations. I observed the nest from a safe distance of 12 m, using 10x42 binoculars. I occasionally observed the nest twice a day, early in the morning (0530–0630 h) and late in the evening (1730–1930 h), when the activities at the nest were at its peak. I photographed the nest tunnel using a small low-beam torch, a DSLR camera with a 200–500 mm lens, and a mobile phone. Nest interior shots were taken at night to avoid disturbance to parent birds

From late February, I observed a pair of Blue-bearded Bee-eaters near the nesting site. By 25 March 2025, the pair had already occupied the previous year's nest tunnel, which I have observed being reused for the past three years. One of the individuals had a damaged bill with a broken tip on the upper mandible **[283]**. This individual also had worn tail feathers. These features enabled me to separate the individuals during my observations. Based on the fact that the other individual **[284]** took up all incubation duties, I presumed the bird with the broken bill to be the male. The presumed male guarded the nest from a nearby lookout perch, responding to intruders, including other birds and humans, with loud, harsh, and repeated territorial calls.

Table 1. Observations at the nest of the Blue-bearded Bee-eater during February–May 2025

Date	Observation	Wall observed
2nd half of February	Pair occupied the nest.	NA
14 April	Single recently hatched nestling at the nest.	NA
22 April (evening)	The wall in the nest observed for the first time.	Yes
23 April (morning)	The wall was dismantled.	No
23 April (evening)	Nestling constructed the wall .	Yes
24 April (morning)	The wall was dismantled.	No
22 April to 14 May	Wall constructed at dusk and dismantled at dawn.	Yes
14 May	Nestling fledged.	No

On 14 April 2025, I observed a single freshly hatched nestling in the nest. The nestling had eyes closed, was featherless, and had a dark pinkish colouration, with a notably well-developed bill **[285]**. I was certain there was only one nestling, but I could not confirm how many eggs were laid due to limitations in observation during the incubation period. Both parents took turns feeding the nestling, perching at the tunnel entrance and making a distinctive low-frequency *tak-tak* call to signal the nestling to approach. Interestingly, the parents did

283. The presumed male Blue-bearded Bee-eater with a broken bill.

284. The presumed female Blue-bearded Bee-eater on the nest hole.

Both photos: Sachin Shrikrishna Prabhu

not enter the nest while feeding; instead, the nestling would actively walk towards the entrance, emitting screaming calls, and after feeding, walk back to the nest chamber. This behavior was observed even on the first day after hatching, when it appeared to be blind. Based on the feed brought by the adults, it appeared that the nestling's diet consisted mainly of insects, including cicadas, bees, and wasps.

All photos: Sachin Shrikrishna Prabhu

285. First day of the nestling with eyes-closed, pinkish body, unfeathered but with a prominent bill.

On 22 April 2025, at 1800 h, the presumed male parent visited the nest with a cicada kill for the nestling. It perched at the entrance of the nest and made the usual *tak-tak* feeding call, presumably expecting the nestling to respond and accept the food. When the nestling failed to respond, the male parent flew out to the lookout perch and continued calling, still holding its prey in it bill. It approached the nest again, attempting to feed the nestling, but was unsuccessful. Ultimately, after a couple of more attempts and waiting for about four to five minutes, the male swallowed this prey. I now got curious as to why the nestling did not respond.

I checked the nest tunnel after sunset to minimize any disturbance to the parent birds. I used a low-beam torch to examine the nest tunnel. On inspection, I saw a wall in the middle of the tunnel, *c.*50 cm from the entrance, constructed with a mixture of mud and debris (Fig. 1). Initially, I wondered if termites had invaded the nest; however, observations from the next morning (0600 h) revealed it not to be the case. Normal feeding cycles by the parents resumed throughout the day, and by evening (1800 h), I again observed a similar wall constructed in the middle of the tunnel.

The next day, after the evening feeding session concluded and the parent birds left for roosting, I sat by the nest to investigate the mystery of the wall. I took all the care to avoid disturbing the nest and nestling. I used a low-beam torch to peek inside the nest tunnel. I observed the nestling constructing the wall with its beak in the middle of the tunnel. However, as the torch beam fell on the nestling, it stopped the wall-making process and retreated into the tunnel chamber. When I checked after 30 min, the wall was completely constructed. I avoided taking photos or videos during the wall construction process to prevent disturbance and

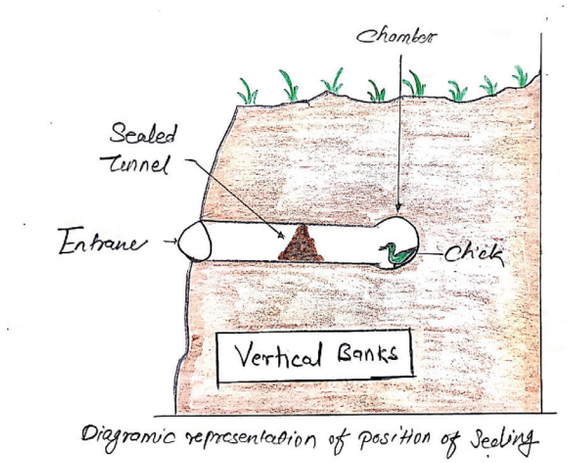
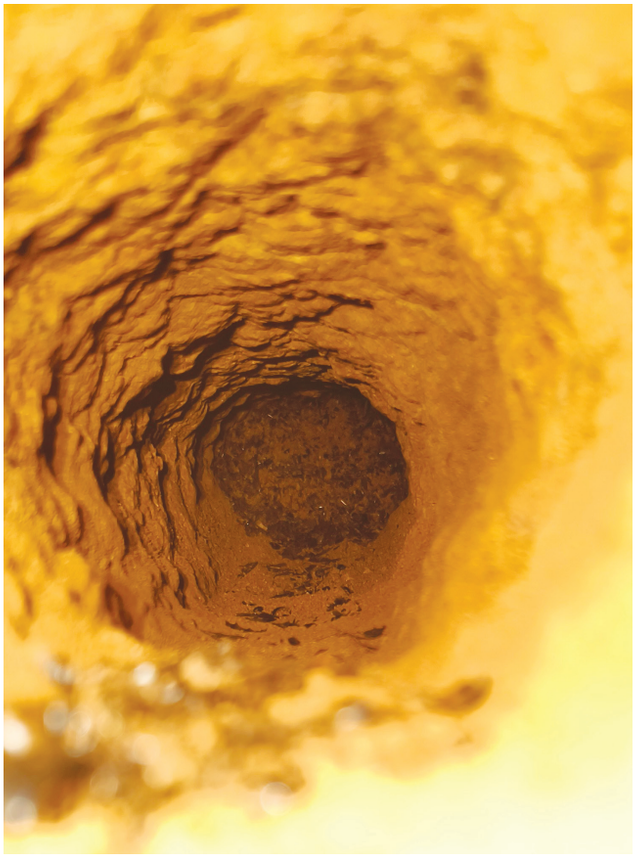


Fig. 1. Diagram of the nest of Blue-bearded Bee-eater showing the chamber and the position of the wall.

captured images only after the wall was completed. The next morning the wall was dismantled before 0600h.

Regular observations revealed that the nestling constructs the wall between 1730 to 1800 h at dusk, taking about 15–20 min, and dismantles it at dawn before around 0600 h (Table 1). Upon examining the photographs and observing the dismantled wall, I found that the wall was composed of mud and prey remains, including wings and debris **[286]**. As the nestling grew, its wall-building materials shifted from predominantly prey remains to more mud, with a corresponding decrease in debris

286. The wall on 22 April consisted mainly of prey remains and mud.



287. The wall on 27 April consisted mainly of mud and some debris.

288. The Wall on 13 May consisted mainly of mud and some debris.

All photos: Sachin Shrikrishna Prabhu

use **[287, 288]**. The nestling apparently moved the dismantled material into the tunnel chamber, preventing any obstruction within the nest tunnel.

The presumed female stayed with the nestling at night during the initial days after hatching, when the nestling's eyes were closed. Although irregular observations after hatching prevented me from determining the exact start date of wall-making behaviour, my observations indicate that the presumed female stayed at the nest until the nestling becomes capable of building the wall. It is not known whether the female was also building a wall at dusk. On 22 April 2025, the ninth day after hatching, I observed the nestling constructing the wall for the first time, and this behaviour continued until fledging on 14 May 2025 (Table 1).

On 14 May 2025, I observed the nestling fledge out. It received food from both parents while perching on an Acacia tree. By evening 1900 h, I checked the nest and found it empty, with no signs of wall-making or presence of the nestling. These observations, combined with earlier ones, confirmed that the nestling must have fledged after 30 days (14 April to 14 May 2025).

The nest sealing behaviour has been documented only in hornbills (Family: Bucerotidae, Order: Bucerotiformes), where females, sometimes assisted by males, seal the nest cavity entrance with a wall made of mud and droppings, leaving only a narrow aperture for the male to transfer food (Kemp 1995). This behavior likely serves to protect nesting sites from predators and rival hornbills. However, bee-eaters have not been reported to exhibit any kind of nest-sealing behavior, making this observation noteworthy, especially because the wall was constructed by the nestling.

I assume that the wall likely acted as a protection for the nestling against intruders and predators. As this behaviour occurred daily during the nestling period, specifically from dusk to dawn, this seems to be an innate protection strategy. It also highlights the need for more nocturnal studies in understanding nest protection strategies, particularly against nocturnal predators. This can provide valuable insights into the adaptive behaviors employed by birds and to safeguard their nests. Do other cavity nesting birds also employ a similar strategy? We would need more studies on the same.

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A Sanderling *Calidris alba* from Hokersar Wetland, Jammu & Kashmir, India

The Sanderling *Calidris alba* is a small, plump sandpiper, most commonly associated with sandy coastal beaches (Sangha 2021) with gilt artwork on front board, and gilt lettering on spine; with illus., dust cover. It is a long-distance migrant, breeding primarily in the high arctic tundra in Alaska, Canadian Arctic Archipelago, Greenland, Norway, the Taymyr Peninsula, Severnaya Zemlya, mouth of the Lena River, and the New Siberian Islands, Russia (Macwhirter et al. 2020). In winter, it is found throughout almost all temperate and tropical marine beaches (Myers et al. 1985; Macwhirter et al. 2020). In India, it winters on both western and eastern coast as well as Lakshadweep, South Andaman, and Car Nicobar Islands and rarely found inland during passage migration (Praveen 2025).

On the evening of 22 May 2025, we were birdwatching at Hokersar Wetland Conservation Reserve (34.103°N, 74.717°E; *c.* 1,580 m asl), located in the Kashmir Valley, Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir, India. At about 1840 h, we noticed a bird actively foraging along the exposed muddy shoreline of the wetland along with a Little Stint *Calidris minuta*. Initially, we thought it to be a female of a Little Stint. However, after a close observation, HS pointed towards its distinctive size and plumage identifying it as a Sanderling **[289]**. The bird appeared noticeably bulkier and paler than the accompanying Little Stint **[290]**. We managed to take several photographs and subsequently shared them on the 'Birds of Kashmir' WhatsApp group, where it was confirmed as Sanderling by Irfan Jeelani and Ashwin Viswanathan. It stayed at Hokersar Wetland for two days and was not seen thereafter.

Both Photos: Reyan Sofi

289. Sanderling photographed from Hokersar Wetland, Jammu & Kashmir on 22 May 2025.

290. Size comparison between Sanderling and Little Stint photographed from Hokersar Wetland, Jammu & Kashmir on 22 May 2025.

The present record constitutes the first photographic record of Sanderling from Jammu & Kashmir. The species is listed in the checklist of birds of Jammu & Kashmir by Kichloo et al. (2024) based on a historical specimen of a female bird collected by W. L. Abbott from Wular Lake on 23 October 1891, which is now housed in the National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, USA (GBIF 2025). Considering the rarity of Sanderling being recorded inland in the Indian subcontinent (Praveen 2025), its appearance at Hokersar Wetland, a freshwater habitat in Jammu & Kashmir, is a noteworthy record and expands our understanding of the species' migratory patterns and habitat use in northern India.

We thank Muzaffar A Kichloo for helping with the manuscript.

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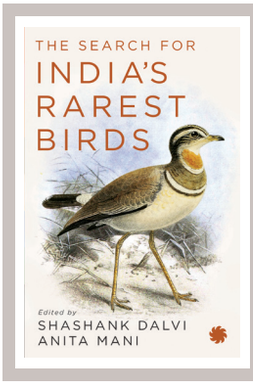
– Praveen J, Puja Sharma, Pritam Baruah & Muzaffar A. Kichloo

Book review



The Search for India's Rarest Birds
Shashank Dalvi & Anita Mani (Eds.)
2024.

Published by Juggernaut & Indian Pitta Books.
December 2024.
Pp. 1–280.

This is a delightful book with tales of rare birds in India. There are 12 chapters by different authors covering the whole spectrum of searching for rare and poorly-known birds in India and surrounding countries.

James Eaton notes that 'birders generally are a bunch that enjoy treading the well-trodden path, rarely straying to explore areas, leaving the less-explored areas open for those with a sense of adventure'. I hope this book will encourage birders to step off these paths where the avifauna is already pretty well known and search for birds that are poorly known, or even entirely unknown.

Frank Rheindt writes about 'Finding the next rare bird for India' mentioning that only three bird species new to science have been described from India since 2000. He suggests three areas or strategies that could turn up new birds for India: pelagic species, Eastern Palearctic migrants and resident birds from Myanmar that could be found on the Indian side of the border. However, there are no suggestions as to where to look for undescribed birds. The Bugun Liocichla *Liocichla bugunorum* was described in 2006 from West Kameng district in Arunachal Pradesh. This district (area 7,422 sq. km) was home to a large majority (c.3,400) of recent eBird checklists from the state, with records of 597 species. In contrast two nearby districts, Kra Daadi and Kurung Kumey (combined area 8,183 sq. km) together generated only 19 checklists with a combined total of 85 species. If coverage had been equal to that of West Kameng who knows what might have been discovered!

I know from personal experience that there are birds waiting to be discovered in the Indian Subcontinent. In November 1970 I, accompanied by two fellow British birders, was following a trail in Helambu, Nepal, using a basic tourist map. The map showed the trail climbing up a ridge from Tharepati at 3,500 m asl but, after ascending about 500 m asl with increasing difficulty the 'trail' petered out. Whilst discussing what to do a small bird landed beside me. It resembled a Black-winged Snowfinch *Montifringilla adamsi* but had a sharply demarcated black head (and much white in the wing), a character which I subsequently realised is not shown by any known snowfinch, or the inappropriately named Black-headed Mountain Finch *Leucosticte brandti*, which has, at best, a rather diffuse sooty-coloured head. It was only there briefly so I was not able to get a complete description. I doubt whether any birders have been there since so this mystery remains to be resolved.

The remaining 11 accounts encompass a fascinating eclectic mix of different aspects of encountering rare birds in India. Aasheesh Pittie discusses the history of the Pink-headed Duck *Rhodonessa caryophyllacea*, which was last seen in the wild in 1935 in Bihar. Despite the lack of records for 90 years Aasheesh hopes that it might be rediscovered.

Three of the accounts relate to rediscovery of 'lost' species. Bharat Bhushan writes about Jerdon's Courser *Rhinoptilus bitorquatus*, which had not been seen since 1900; he refound it thanks to a local bird trapper in Andhra Pradesh. Pamela Rasmussen was instrumental in rediscovering the Forest Owlet *Athene blewitti* in Maharashtra, after it had been missing for 113 years. Puja Sharma and Andrew Spencer went to Phawngpui in Mizoram to search for Mount Victoria Babax *Pterorhinus woodi*. This species was first found there in 1953 but then, apart from two little-known sightings in 1977 and 2016, it was considered one of the 'hardest species to find' in India. After several days searching to no avail they were packing up to leave when a singing Babax stopped them in their tracks. Several accounts involve species that are poorly known because the areas they inhabit are relatively hard to access. One account details a newly-described species. Shashank Dalvi recounts the story of the finding and description of the Nicobar Scops-Owl *Otus alius* from Great Nicobar Island, a species that has been found to be common in its limited range but overlooked because of the difficulty of accessing its habitat. Radhika Raj also writes about Great Nicobar Island but a quite different bird, the extraordinary mound-building Nicobar Megapode *Megapodius nicobariensis*. Radhika spent three weeks trying to see the megapodes, building eight hides in different areas and finally had brief views of one. Praveen J. describes his efforts to find and study the Banasura Laughingthrush (Chilappan) *Montecincla jerdoni* in the high altitudes of a very restricted area in the Western Ghats of northern Kerala. His team found the species to be fairly common once they got high enough up and gathered important information on vocalizations and breeding behaviour.

Sayam U. Chowdhury recounts his experiences with Masked Finfoot *Heliopais personatus* in the Bangladesh Sundarbans. He learnt a lot about the breeding biology but the survival of the species in Bangladesh is not assured. Anita Mani and Shashank Dalvi write about Mrs. Hume's Pheasant *Syrmaticus humiae*, a bird that was rarely seen in the wild until local hunters turned conservationists in Manipur showed that it could be found in night roosts. James Eaton followed up on a handful of the only recent sightings of the Long-billed Bush Warbler *Locustella major*, the most recent being from the Gilgit-Baltistan area of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir; he succeeded in finding several singing birds. Finally, Atul Jain, one of the foremost 'twitchers' in India writes about seven memorable trips chasing rare residents: Temminck's Tragopan *Tragopan temminckii* and Hodgson's Frogmouth *Batrachostomus hodgsoni* in Arunachal Pradesh, Mrs. Hume's Pheasant in Manipur, Chin Hills Wren-Babbler *Spelaeornis oatesi* in Mizoram, and Narcondam Hornbill *Rhyticeros narcondami* on Narcondam Island. Also two vagrant species: Mandarin Duck *Aix galericulata* on Little Andaman Island and Yellow-rumped Flycatcher *Ficedula zanthopygia* in Kerala.

In conclusion I thoroughly recommend this book to anyone who wishes to learn about poorly-known birds in India, or indeed in surrounding countries. The techniques used to find the birds in these accounts could usefully be employed elsewhere to hopefully lead to discoveries of unknown birds, rediscoveries of other lost birds, or more generally to fill in gaps in distribution. Perusal of a map showing eBird records from India shows areas with few or no records, not just in expected areas such as deserts in the north-west or upland areas of the north-east, but also in central areas like Jharkhand.

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Lesser Kestrel
Taxonomy update
White-faced Plover

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