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.

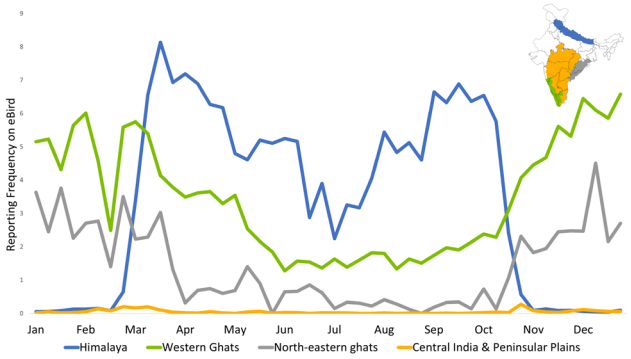

Fig. 1 Reporting frequency of Chestnut-headed Bee-eaters using eBird bar charts for India and Nepal in four regions (see inset map) in Indian subcontinent.

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