

Correspondence

A Barau's Petrel *Pterodroma baraui* near Little Nicobar, Andaman & Nicobar Islands, India

A sea voyage across the Andaman Sea to the Great Nicobar Island in search of endemic species always brings high expectations. Knowing that this journey would require nearly 30 h over open sea, our hopes of encountering pelagic birds soared. Unfortunately, those hopes were dampened on the first day of our voyage from Port Blair to Campbell Bay. The sky was thick with clouds, rain swept across the decks from time to time, and the only seabird we managed to spot was a single Black-naped Tern *Sterna sumatrana* while departing from Port Blair.

The following morning, 10 September 2025, we had a brief stop at Kamorta in the Nancowry group of islands. We saw two more Black-naped Terns, but nothing else. With little else to do on board, I found myself glued to the cabin's small window as our vessel traversed the Andaman Sea. Roughly two and a half hours after leaving Kamorta, I began to glimpse Little Nicobar faintly towards the southwest. About ten minutes later, at around 1040 h, dark birds appeared, flying fast and low over the water, on the starboard side of the ship. Their movement suggested shearwaters, immediately raising excitement. I called out to our guide, Prodip Sardar, and fellow traveler D.V. Ramesh.

Through the narrow window, Ramesh and I managed to capture hurried record shots—our only chance at documentation, with a storm-darkened sky and the pitch and roll of the vessel complicating matters. In those fleeting seconds, I tracked one bird with brownish upper-wings and conspicuously white underwings flying close to the ship. Just a couple of frames [45–46] and then a downpour ended further observation.

My compass log marked the coordinates as 7.496°N, 93.840°E. There were no further encounters of note during the remainder of that leg. That evening, our discussions gained fresh perspective with Madhu Gupta, a birder from Delhi who had passed the same waters a week earlier, suggesting Wedge-tailed Shearwater *Ardenna pacifica* as the possible ID. Later, I posted the record shots to the Pelagic Discussion group, where Ramit Singal responded almost immediately. He confirmed most of the birds as Wedge-tailed Shearwaters, but singled out one individual with a heavier bill and a dark rump as a Barau's Petrel *Pterodroma baraui*.

Photographs are grainy and not all features are visible. Both photographs showed only upper-wings and no details of underparts were noted. However, the combination of grey back, thick dark bill, dark mask, paler grey secondaries compared to coverts, leaves no other likely seabird in the tropical Indian Ocean other than Barau's Petrel. Though structurally it is a Gadfly *Pterodroma* Petrel, there are other species in this group that occurs in Southern and Pacific Oceans that need careful elimination. Of particular concern is Juan Fernandez Petrel *P. externa*, which occurs in southern Pacific Ocean (Harrison et al. 2021). Overall, this bird looked a bit large-headed, short-tailed, and short-winged for a Juan Fernandez Petrel. The head and collar colour and the shape for the collar with a clean cheek cutoff and a sharp angle down into the collar are also supportive of Barau's Petrel. In the absence of underwing shots, the short-looking bill, compact structure, and lack of a pale crescent around the upper-



45. Barau's Petrel showing grey upperwings and black head mask.



46. Barau's Petrel showing long grey upperwings and uniform uppertail coverts.

Both photos: Srinivas Daripeni

tail coverts on the rectrices are also much better for Barau's than Juan Fernandez Petrel. Though the latter feature is not diagnostic, particularly fresh Juan Fernandez usually does not show this, this bird is worn enough that a Juan Fernandez in this plumage would have shown a pale crescent around upper-tail coverts even in these grainy photographs.

On our return voyage, pelagic bird activity was livelier northeast of Little Nicobar, between 7.365°N, 93.851°E and 7.492°N, 93.805°E. Shearwaters crossed our path again, with photos confirming Streaked Shearwaters *Calonectris leucomelas* this time.

Barau's Petrel breeds only on the Réunion Island in the Indian Ocean (Carboneras et al. 2020). During the non-breeding season these birds may travel up to 5,000 km, at times reaching waters off Sri Lanka. Hence, there is a good chance of seeing this petrel near Little Nicobar. Despite being a non-breeding visitor to tropical Indian Ocean, there is only one previous record of this species within the Indian limits. It was admitted to the Indian checklist based on two well-documented sightings on 27 June 1985 between Kavaratti and Minicoy Islands, in the Lakshadweep archipelago (van den Berg et al. 1991; Praveen et al. 2013). In their sea journey through the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal, they reported 19 more Barau's Petrels, though all of them fell outside the Indian waters (van den Berg et al. 1991). At least two Barau's Petrels were reported further west of Nicobar Islands on 10 June 2012 (Ryan 2012; Mondreti et al. 2020). Although the exact location is not known, it is likely that its distance from the nearest Indian island (Little Nicobar) is more than 200 nautical miles. Hence, this would be the second report of this species from India, after 40 years, this time with photographic evidence.

I thank Ramit Singal for identification pointers and confirmation of the species.

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The Pin-tailed Parrotfinch *Erythrura prasina* in Namdapha National Park, Arunachal Pradesh, India

The Pin-tailed Parrotfinch *Erythrura prasina* is a small estrildid finch distinguished by its striking plumage. The male has a blue forehead, face, and throat, black lores, and green upperparts. The rump, uppertail-coverts, and tail are red. The breast, flanks, and undertail-coverts are buffish, with a red median stripe along the belly. The tail is long and pointed, giving the species its characteristic appearance. The female has a more faded blue face, lacks the red belly, and has a shorter tail (Payne 2020). The species is resident in Thailand, southern Myanmar, Peninsular Malaysia, southern Cambodia, northern and central Laos, Vietnam, Sumatra, and Java (Payne 2020). It has been described as a ghostlike bird that materializes in large numbers during rice harvest and bamboo seeding events, and promptly vanishes afterwards (eBird 2025).

Namdapha National Park (1,985 km²) along with the adjoining community forests, is situated in Changlang and Lohit Districts of south-eastern Arunachal Pradesh, along India's border with northern Myanmar. Owing to its wide elevational range (200–4,571 m asl), the park encompasses multiple vegetation zones, ranging from tropical wet evergreen and moist deciduous forests at lower elevations to temperate broadleaved and coniferous forests, and alpine vegetation at higher elevations (Srinivasan et al. 2010). At lower elevations, tropical wet evergreen forests are characterised by tall multi-layered canopies and extensive bamboo thickets, wild bananas, and occasional stretches of tall grass, particularly along roadsides and riverine tracts. The undergrowth is often thick and intertwined, comprising canes, bamboos and a diverse assemblage of shrubs and herbs, resulting in structurally complex habitats that support astonishingly high avian diversity.

BH led a birding group comprising of VG, MB and BKG to Namdapha during early January 2026 to explore its avifauna. On our return from Vijoyanagar area of Changlang District on 06 January, we were birding along the Miao-Vijoyanagar Road, which is a dirt track along the Noa-Dihing River. At the 62 milestone on the Miao-Vijoyanagar Road, we stopped to look for the White-bellied Heron *Ardea insignis* in the Noa-Dihing River (27.460°N, 96.649°E; c.650 m asl). It was a mixed forest patch with dense

undergrowth and ample proportion of bamboo, only a few of which were flowering. BH pointed towards a flock of about 20 White-rumped Munias *Lonchura striata* feeding on a branch of bamboo flowers overhanging the road. BKG looked up and found two reddish-orange birds towards the end of the branch, feeding exactly like the munias. BKG immediately pointed out these unusual birds to our guide BH and wondered whether they were some sort of minivets [47, 48]. BH looked carefully through his binoculars and confirmed that these unfamiliar birds might be a new species for this region. The identification of the bird pictures as Pin-tailed Parrotfinch was achieved on the spot through Merlin app. Further observation revealed that there were two male and two female parrotfinches feeding aggressively on the bamboo seeds. They stayed there for about 30 minutes and then disappeared. The munias had left around 10 minutes before them. It was subsequently recorded at the same bamboo flowering branch and another one 100 m away on multiple occasions by different birding groups of BH, with the most recent sighting occurring on 15 February 2026 by BH.



47. A male Pin-tailed Parrotfinch showing its characteristic pin tail and blue face.



48. Male and female Pin-tailed Parrotfinches while they were feeding on bamboo seeds along with White-rumped Munias.