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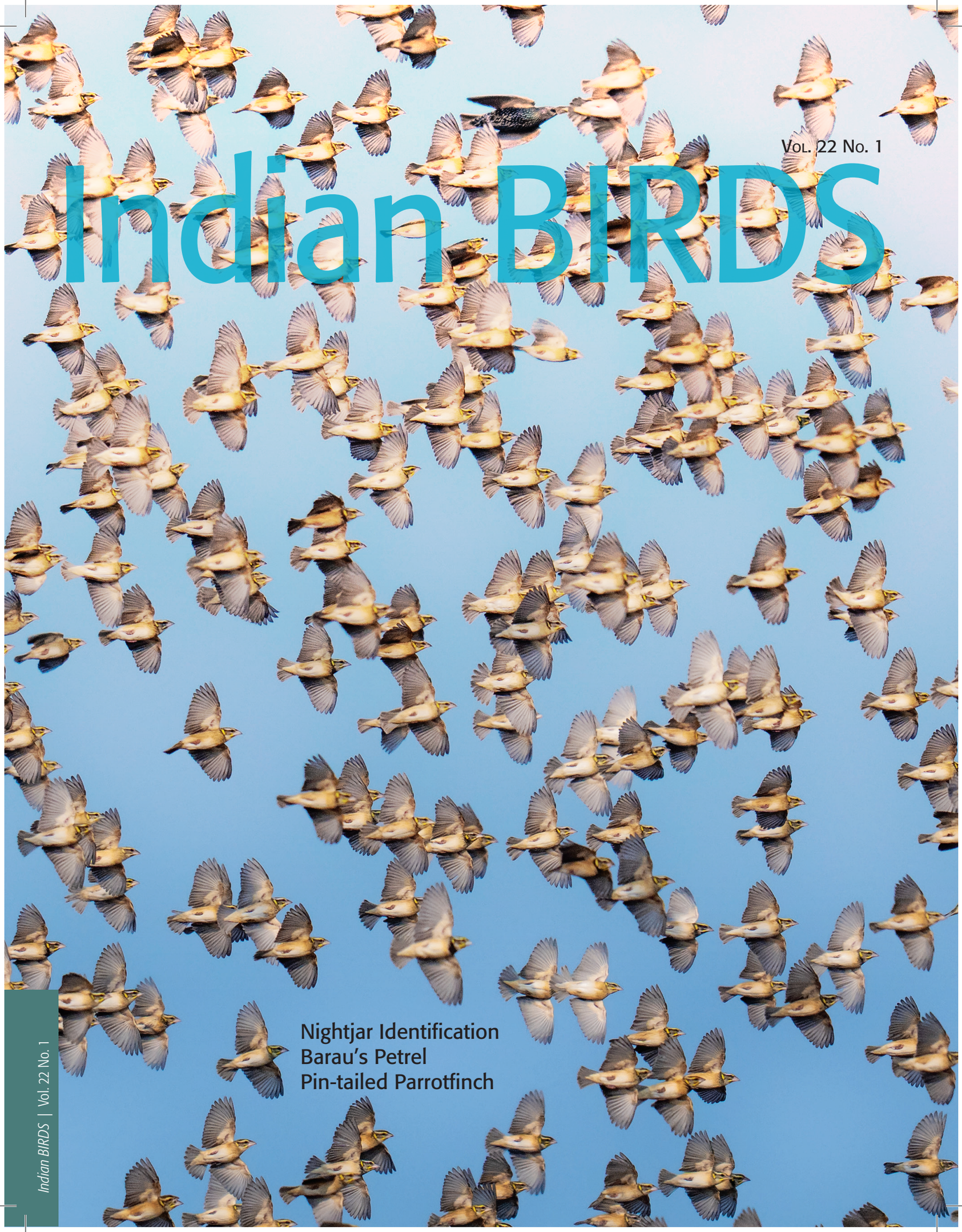

Nightjar Identification
Barau's Petrel
Pin-tailed Parrotfinch

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Field identification of the Savanna Nightjar *Caprimulgus affinis* and the Sykes's Nightjar *Caprimulgus mahrattensis*: A cryptic challenge

Prasad Ganpule

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Abstract

Difficulties in field identification of Savanna Nightjar *Caprimulgus affinis* and Sykes's Nightjar *C. mahrattensis* has not been well-appreciated. Using an analysis of images from the field, I demonstrate that their identification is not straightforward and require careful study of a number of features that are often not visible in photographs. Juveniles of both species are especially difficult to identify and both species show variation in juvenile plumages. The pattern of the wing and tail are especially important for identification and sexing the birds in the field.

Introduction

A perched, silent nightjar *Caprimulgus* sp. is one of the difficult identification challenges! Most nightjars have cryptic plumage and are well camouflaged with their surroundings. Being crepuscular and nocturnal, nightjar species are usually not seen during the daytime hours. Hence, the field identification of nightjars is tough and confusing for many birdwatchers.

The Sykes's Nightjar *C. mahrattensis* is a less studied species. It was presumed to be "wintering widely in W India, occasionally reaching environs of Delhi, N Madhya [Pradesh] and Bombay [=Mumbai]" (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). However, it is now known that the Sykes's Nightjar breeds within Indian limits, with breeding recorded from Gujarat (Tiwari & Dadu 2010; Ganpule et al. 2022), and Punjab (Devare 2003), and breeding suspected in Rajasthan (Sangha et al. 2023). The Savanna Nightjar *C. affinis* is widely distributed and a resident in most parts of the country. Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) considered it to be a winter visitor to southern India but it is not entirely true as it's known to breed there (Mathew 2000) and certain populations are year round (eBird 2026a). I discuss here the field identification and separation of Savanna Nightjar from Sykes's Nightjar, especially in juvenile plumage, an identification problem which has escaped the attention of most reference works.

In published literature, the Sykes's Nightjar is compared with Indian Nightjar *C. asiaticus* and details of how to separate it from Indian Nightjar are explained in the main reference texts (Grimmett et al. 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012), based on the perceived similarities between these species. The Eurasian Nightjar *C. europaeus* is listed as a species which has a similar song to Sykes's Nightjar (Holyoak 2001). However, given Sykes's Nightjar's similarities to Savanna Nightjar, it is surprising that comparison with the latter species has not been looked into. In photographs of both these species on 'eBird' and other websites, there are some misidentifications.

Ali & Ripley (1983) stated that the Sykes's Nightjar did not occur further east than 77°E in India, discounting two reports from Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. It is now known that its range is quite large. Recent reports of this species from West Bengal (Manna et al. 2024) and Bangladesh (Alam et al. 2019) show that this species occurs in eastern parts of India and in Bangladesh too. More than a dozen reports are known from the eastern Indian subcontinent (eBird 2026b). Thus, the range of Sykes's overlaps with the Savanna Nightjar widely and the chances of confusion between these species is likely to occur in large parts of the country, especially in north, north-western, and eastern India. In fact, Ali & Ripley (1983) provide an example of a juvenile Savanna identified as a Sykes's in museum specimens. Thus, the details presented here will help bird watchers in separating Sykes's from Savanna Nightjar.

Taxonomy

The Sykes's Nightjar is a monotypic species, with a range from south-eastern Iran, southern Afghanistan, Pakistan, and north-western India (Cleere & Kirwan 2020) and no reported geographical variation (Holyoak 2001). The Savanna Nightjar is a polytypic species with a large range, covering South, and Southeast Asia. Recent studies have suggested splitting the Savanna complex into three species, the northern *C. monticolus* group (including *monticolus, amoyensis,* and *stictomus*), the southern *C. affinis* group (including *affinis*, *propinquus*, *undulatus*, *kasuidori*, and *timorensis*) and the Philippine *C. griseatus* (Sangster et al. 2021; Cleere & Boesman 2023). However, this proposed split into three species has not been widely accepted but the Chirruping Nighjar *C. griseatus* from the Philippines is treated as a distinct species while the northern and southern groups are currently retained under *C. affinis* (AviList Core Team 2025; Clements et al. 2025). In India, *C. a. monticolus* is the only subspecies which occurs (Sangster et al. 2021).

Methods and observations

Both the Savanna Nightjar and Sykes's Nightjar are widespread in Gujarat, my study site. I found a roost of Savanna near Morbi, Gujarat (22.827°N, 70.945°E) in August 2008. This roosting site often had eight to ten birds roosting in a small area. I observed their behaviour over two years and the results were published earlier (Ganpule 2010). I continued studying the birds in and around this area and found two more roosts around Morbi, each containing *c.*10–15 individuals. Observations were made all round the year and more than 100 individuals, in different plumages, have been carefully studied over the last 17 years. I

specifically searched for and photographed juvenile birds, which are seen during the monsoon season from June to September. When flushed, I attempted to photograph the birds in flight. This is quite challenging as these birds flush only when approached very close and after taking a short and erratic flight, dive back to the ground, making it difficult to take good flight photographs.

The Sykes's Nightjar is also seen widely in Gujarat, especially in Saurashtra and Kachchh. Observations of Sykes's were made in Banni, and in Greater- and Little Rann of Kachchh (in Kachchh district), at Nal Sarovar Bird Sanctuary, and around Velavadar National Park. Though not as common as the Savanna Nightjar, more than 30 individuals, including juveniles, were seen over the past seven years. I also studied photographs of both nightjars posted on 'eBird', 'iNaturalist', Facebook, and other social media. As a group, nightjars are difficult to illustrate and the finer identification features are often tough to discern from illustrations. With the advent of modern cameras and good lenses, clear photographs of nightjars taken in daylight are now available online and are extremely useful in identification. Hence, these were referred to for understanding finer plumage details.

No museum specimens were checked for this study but nightjar species are sometimes found as road kills in Gujarat due to their habit of perching on village roads in the late evening and at night. I have inspected two Savanna and one Sykes's which were found as road kills near Morbi and in Little Rann of Kachchh respectively. I did not attempt to measure these birds but rather, only inspected these specimens to verify their identification. For this study, birds which did not have adult plumage were considered to be juveniles; I did not attempt to try and understand the difference between juvenile and immature plumage.

The photographs used for this paper were mostly taken during the day, in sunlight, so that the correct plumage features can be ascertained. Photographs of nightjars taken at night often do not show the correct plumage tones since the camera settings or use of artificial light or flash distorts the colours. Two photographs of adults of both species taken at night are given here to illustrate the difficulties in assessing the plumage in such photographs **[1, 2]**; compare plumage with photos taken during the day presented here in this paper. Hence, a conscious effort was made to mainly use photographs taken during the day to represent true plumage details. Captions are added to all photographs explaining the important identification features.

Keys to nightjar identification

Nightjar observations are often made at night and many times, only brief views are obtained or the bird is perched in such a way that it is difficult to observe it properly. Hence, to properly identify a Savanna/Syke's Nightjar in the field, the following features need to be noted, seen well or photographed:

1. Face pattern: For details of moustachial stripe, throat patch and crown stripe or markings
2. Nuchal collar: The presence or absence of nuchal collar and its colour if present
3. Scapulars: Pattern of scapulars
4. Wings and tail: The presence or absence of spots on outer primaries and outer tail feathers
5. Wing coverts: For pattern, shape and colour of markings
6. Underparts: The pattern of the underparts (often difficult to see on perched nightjars – only the throat and upper breast is mainly visible most of the times)

It should be noted that birds in moult or birds in worn plumage may look different from birds in fresh plumage. Feather wear affects the plumage colour and such worn birds often look dull. Thus, it is important to check the state of plumage. Juvenile nightjars often have a somewhat different plumage from adults and hence, it is also necessary to age the birds for correct identification. Though sexual dimorphism is not stark in both these species, there are differences in the wing and tail pattern between the sexes, and minor differences in body plumage. Hence, observations of wing and tail can be useful in sexing individuals in the field. Most birders depend on calls at night for identification. They are diagnostic, however, in the non-breeding season, nightjars usually remain silent or are less vocal compared to the breeding season!

Results

The details for identification and separation of the Savanna Nightjar from the Sykes's Nightjar are as follows:

Size: The adult Savanna is larger and bulkier than Sykes's. Though it is difficult to judge the size of a single perched bird, with experience, the size difference between these two species is apparent. This size difference is apparent in juveniles as well, with juvenile Savanna being bigger than juvenile Sykes's.

This difference in size in these species in adults is also supported by measurements (Table 1) on museum specimens

Both photos: Nirav Bhatt

1, 2. Adult Savanna Nightjar (left) from Greater Rann of Kachchh, Gujarat in September 2024 and adult Sykes's Nightjar (right) from Desert National Park, Rajasthan in August 2025. Both photographs taken at night, with artificial light. Note how the plumage looks under artificial light and the colour tones can be misleading. However, the wing covert pattern is helpful in identification. Most nightjar photographs are taken at night, due to which the finer plumage details cannot be appreciated.

based on Abdulali (1972) and Ali & Ripley (1983). In addition, Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) provide the total length of Savanna to be 215–240 mm while length of Sykes's as 195–215 mm. Hence, there is hardly any overlap in the sizes of two species. Hence, with some experience, it would be possible to appreciate this size difference in the field as well. Measurements for juveniles are not available and the impression of size difference stated here is based on my own field experience.

Table 1. Wing lengths for Savanna Nightjar and Sykes's Nightjar (in mm.)
* Abdulali (1972) # Ali & Ripley (1983)

	Male	Female
Savanna Nightjar	188–210 (n=14) * 181–205 (n=17) #	179–195 (n=12) * 179–202 (n=23) #
Sykes's Nightjar	164–178 (n=11) (including one juv.) *	161–168 (n=5) *
	157–173 (male and female) #	

Plumage: In general, the adult Savanna Nightjar has grey-brown plumage, with pale orange or pale rufous stripe on scapulars, forming a distinct 'V'. It has pale orange or rufous spots on the wing-coverts, which become whitish with wear. Adult male is greyish-brown while female is paler and browner above, showing more rufous in plumage. However, it is difficult to sex individuals if seen perched. On the underparts, the female shows more barring than the male. The adult Sykes's Nightjar has a pale greyish to sandy-grey plumage, lacking distinct markings on the scapulars, or having weak black-and-buff scapulars. The wings coverts are sandy buff to pale sandy or occasionally a very pale rufous, with a mottled pattern, compared to the neat and distinct spots shown by Savanna. The wing coverts often show thin black horizontal stripes or markings mixed with pale yellow or buff (are vermiculated), adding to its cryptic plumage. The underparts show thin barring. In general, the plumage in Savanna is darker, with more neatly marked wing coverts, than in Sykes's. Photos of adults of both species are given here to demonstrate their identification features, including birds in fresh and worn plumages **[3–11]**.

All photos: Prasad Ganpule

3. Adult male Savanna Nightjar. Note the white patch on throat side and the extensive white in tail visible on the underside of the tail, a helpful feature to identify this bird as a male. The markings on the wing coverts are rufous brown and the scapular stripe is partially visible; barred underparts. Photo taken in late evening. This individual is in worn plumage. April 2025, near Morbi, Gujarat.

4. Adult female Savanna Nightjar. The lack of white in tail and absence of white throat patch indicates female. Note the distinct rufous-orange stripe on scapulars and the prominent rufous-orange markings on wing coverts. Scattered black marks on the head and rufous on nuchal collar is evident. Many Savanna Nightjars look quite rufous in freshly moulted plumage like this. This photo was erroneously labelled as a male in Ganpule (2010). November 2008, near Morbi, Gujarat.

5, 6. Adult Savanna Nightjars in worn plumage, male on top and female on bottom. Note the off-white (vis-a-vis pale rufous) markings on the wing coverts in both birds. The pale 'V' on the scapulars is faded in the bird on right/bottom, which is a female while the bird on top/left shows white throat patch and whitish edge of outer tail feather is visible, indicating a male. Birds in worn plumage lack the prominent rufous markings on wing coverts and scapulars seen in **[4]**. Such worn plumaged birds are seen in May-June, during the breeding season. Top: June 2024 and Bottom: May 2025, both near Morbi, Gujarat.

Photo: Falguna Shah

7. Adult male Sykes's Nightjar. The small white throat patch and the white tail spots indicate this as a male. Lack of any prominent scapular pattern is typical of this species. The wing coverts show pale buff spots with black horizontal stripes. A hint of pale buff nuchal collar is visible. May 2018, Velavadar National Park, Gujarat.

Photo: Manoj Dholakia

8. Adult female Sykes's Nightjar. The tail corners and partially visible wing spots are buffish, which indicates a female. This individual was seen brooding its chicks. Similar to male but lacks distinct white throat patch and pattern on wing coverts is neater, with buffish-yellow colour. The underparts show fine barring. April 2025, Velavadar National Park, Gujarat.

Photo: Prasad Ganpule

9. Adult Sykes's Nightjar, probably a female. This individual is in worn plumage. The plumage looks faded, with the wing covert markings dull and many feathers looking abraded. This could be a female, as two chicks are visible below its body. Tail and wing markings not seen. The scapulars do not show any markings while nuchal collar is not apparent. Some barring on chest is visible. June 2025, Velavadar National Park, Gujarat.

In the Savanna Nightjar, juveniles lack the distinct 'V' on the scapulars and the overall plumage is grey-brown. However, some individuals are paler grey-brown with rufous edges on upperparts. Often there are no clear distinguishing marks in young birds. However, the overall plumage is mottled, with only faint rufous or buff spots on the wing coverts. But some individuals may even lack those spots. Thus, the overall effect is often of a featureless, dark grey-brown bird. The underparts are pale buffy, and show fine barring. The variation in juvenile plumage of Savanna is rather extensive but a few photographs are given here to demonstrate a few of the variations. **[12–17].**

Photo: Kandarp Andharia

10, 11. Adult Sykes's Nightjars. Note that the plumage in these individuals looks greyish rather than the usual yellowish-buff, and wing covert markings are not pale buff or yellowish but rather, more greyish than buff. Some pale yellowish markings on lower mantle and buffish nuchal collar apparent in the top bird. Wing and tail pattern cannot be seen and hence it is difficult to sex this individual. The bottom bird is more greyish than sandy-buff but some typical wing covert markings are visible. The tail corners are white, indicating a male. Top – March 2025, Little Rann of Kachchh, Gujarat and Bottom – April 2025, Velavadar National Park, Gujarat.

12. A typical juvenile Savanna Nightjar. Note the overall dark grey-brown plumage. There are scattered black-and-rufous markings on the wing coverts and mantle. It lacks the rufous 'V' on scapulars seen in adults. The head is largely unmarked but the forehead is paler. August 2025, near Morbi, Gujarat.

All photos: Prasad Ganpule

13. Juvenile Savanna Nightjar. This individual has a rufous cast to plumage and largely lacks the rufous markings on wing coverts. There are scattered black markings on the scapulars and it shows a hint of nuchal collar. The head is largely unmarked. This is likely a fresh juvenile and based on the partially visible rufous spots on wings, a female. June 2025, near Morbi, Gujarat.

14. Juvenile Savanna Nightjar. This bird shows only scattered black markings on the wing coverts and mantle. Some barring is visible on the breast. The crown is somewhat paler than the mantle. Overall, shows paler greyish-brown plumage. August 2025, near Morbi, Gujarat.

15. Juvenile Savanna Nightjar. A paler individual, greyish in plumage. Shows only a few rufous markings on the wing coverts. Lacks the pale 'V' on scapulars, indicating juvenile plumage. Note that it shows a largely unmarked plumage though some typical rufous markings on wing coverts are visible near the alula. The whitish markings on the wings could be due to feather wear. 31 May 2025, near Morbi, Gujarat.

All photos: Prasad Ganpule

16. Juvenile Savanna Nightjar. Not as dark as normal juvenile birds, with scattered black-and-rufous markings on wing coverts and mantle. Shows a hint of nuchal collar. Note that such birds can be mistaken for juvenile Sykes's Nightjar but the rufous markings on wing coverts, larger size, and tail pattern is useful in identification. August 2024, near Morbi, Gujarat.

In the Sykes's Nightjar, juveniles too lack any distinguishing marks but the overall plumage is paler and sandy-grey, which is usually much paler than the plumage shown by any juvenile Savanna Nightjar. The wing coverts are mottled, with fine blackish stripes on sandy-grey ground colour, lacking any discernible pattern. The underparts are creamy buff, with fine barring. Some photographs of juvenile Sykes's are presented here **[18–21]**. Though both these species can lack any distinguishing marks and can look featureless, subtle plumage features are useful in identification. Sykes's has a pale yellow, pale buff or pale greyish-yellow or buffy-yellow overall plumage compared to a darker grey-brownish plumage in Savanna. Further, the mottling and vermiculation on the wing coverts show a pale yellowish or buff colour while in a Savanna, a pale rufous colour is often visible or the markings can be grey-brownish.

Photo: Dimple and Maulik Varu

17. Juvenile Savanna Nightjar. A dark bird, lacking any distinctive marking on the upperparts! Note that the plumage looks quite dark grey-brown, with some mottling. The barring on the breast is visible. The head looks paler than the mantle, with scattered blackish streaks. Juveniles with such plumage are fairly common. August 2024, near Morbi, Gujarat.

18. Juvenile Sykes's Nightjar. A recently fledged bird. Note the overall sandy-greyish plumage, lacking any distinguishing markings. The tail is not fully grown yet and this bird was flying only short distances. Note that there are only few blackish markings on wing coverts. 29 March 2025, Little Rann of Kachchh, Gujarat.

Both photos: Prasad Ganpule

19. Juvenile Sykes's Nightjar. A recently fledged bird. Note the fluffy plumage, indicating juvenile. Except for a few blackish feathers on the crown and scapulars, the plumage is mottled, lacking any prominent plumage features. March 2025, Little Rann of Kachchh, Gujarat.

Photo: Ashish Babre

20. Juvenile Sykes's Nightjar. A darker individual but note the buffish wash and pale mottling to wing covert feathers. The crown is paler than the mantle, and the tail feathers show buffish sides. Note the black markings on the mantle, similar to markings seen in Savanna Nightjar. But the overall paler plumage, buffish underparts and the lack of pale rufous markings on wing coverts is useful in identification. July 2021, Palghar, Maharashtra.

Photo: Nirav Bhatt

21. Sykes's Nightjar chicks at nest. The two chicks seen here had not left the nest but note that juvenile-type plumage has already been acquired. The plumage is sandy-grey, lacking any distinguishing marks. Savanna Nightjar chicks are much darker and more rufous. These chicks were very well camouflaged with the soil colour in the Rann. Since at this age the chicks are looked after by the parents, the identification is easy. March 2025, Little Rann of Kachchh, Gujarat.

It is difficult to sex the birds in juvenile plumages in both these species unless seen well in flight. The plumage in juveniles is often fluffy and more variegated, which is also helpful in ageing the birds.

Face pattern: In the adult Savanna Nightjar, the crown is grey-brown, with scattered pale rufous and black spots. However, in worn plumage, it may only show blackish streaks **[22]**. The male shows a small white patch on throat side while the female shows a buffy throat patch. However, this throat patch is often not visible when the bird is perched. It usually shows a hint of rufous nuchal collar, though there is much individual variation. In Sykes's Nightjar, the crown shows scattered dark markings, which are usually diamond-shaped but these can be irregularly shaped **[23]**. The male has a whitish spot on throat side, often obscured due to posture, and shows weak pale rufous or sandy nuchal collar. The female is similar, showing a buffy spot on throat side and a relatively weaker nuchal collar.

In the juvenile Savanna Nightjar, the head is mottled, with no distinguishing marks but few individuals show incomplete, pale rufous nuchal collar. In the Sykes's Nightjar too, the head is usually featureless, with sparse and scattered black, diamond-shaped or irregular markings on the crown. The overall colour is paler sandy or sandy-buff in Sykes's.

Wing and tail pattern: The adult male Savanna Nightjar has white spots on four outer primaries (P7–P10) and mainly white two outer rectrices (R5–R4) **[24]**. The entire two outer rectrices are white, with dark tip. The female also has four spots on primaries, mainly buffish or pale rufous but in very worn plumage, in May and June, it can show whitish spots tinged with rufous. The tail is banded buff and brown in female, with mostly buffy edges, thereby lacking any white in tail. The female is more extensively barred on the underparts than the male, which is often visible in flight **[25]**.

In comparison, the male Sykes's Nightjar has large, rounded white spots on the outer primaries but only the tail corners have broad, white spots (lacking the all-white tail of male Savanna Nightjar). Though both these species show white spots on outer primaries, Sykes's has relatively larger, more elongated white spots. In Sykes's, the female has smaller white spots, often fulvous tinged, compared to the white spots in male. However, many female Sykes's show white spots rather than buffish spots on the primaries **[26–29]**. Some male Sykes's show prominent white spots on four outer primaries (P7–P10) as can be seen in the photo of the wing given here **[30]** but usually three white spots on primaries are common.

Photo: Prasad Ganpule

22. Face pattern of an adult Savanna Nightjar in worn plumage. Some blackish streaks are present on the crown. This individual shows a distinct pale rufous nuchal collar. June 2025, near Morbi, Gujarat.

Photo: Devvratsinh Mori

23. Face pattern of adult Sykes's Nightjar. This front view clearly shows the irregular, black markings on the crown. The crown is pale buffish and this bird shows a hint of pale nuchal collar. Nightjars are often found perched in this position, making it difficult to see other plumage features though the typical wing covert markings are visible. November 2013, Nal Sarovar Bird Sanctuary, Gujarat.

Photo: Prasad Ganpule

24. Adult male Savanna Nightjar in flight. The white spots on four outermost primaries are prominent. Even when the tail is not fanned, the white edges of the tail feathers are often visible, as can be seen here, and this individual can be identified as a male. The white throat spot and the buffish scapular stripes can be seen from this angle. May 2025, near Morbi, Gujarat.

Photo: Prasad Ganpule

25. Adult female Savanna Nightjar in flight. The spots on the four outermost primaries are pale rufous rather than white. Note the barring on underparts and the lack of white throat patch. Also lacks white in tail, and in combination with other features, can be identified as a female in worn plumage, with some primaries abraded. June 2025, near Morbi, Gujarat.

Photo: Jaysukh Parekh 'Suman'

Photo: Nirav Bhatt

26, 27. Dorsal views of male (top) and female (bottom) Sykes's Nightjar. Both were road kills. The male shows large white spots on three outer primaries, and a small spot on P7. The two outer tail feathers have white spots distally. In comparison, the female has smaller pale rufous spots on two outer primaries, with small buff spot on P8. The tail spots are pale rufous and only partially visible. Photo of female is taken at night. Topt: January 2025, Banni, Kachchh, Gujarat. Bottom: November 2013, Little Rann of Kachchh, Gujarat.

Photo: Ishaan Lalbhai

28. Adult male Sykes's Nightjar in flight. Shows large white spots on three outer primaries, with small pale buffish spot on P7. The tail is closed, due to which the distal white tail spots are not visible. The white throat patch is partially seen and the wing covert markings are typical of this species. June 2025, Nal Sarovar Bird Sanctuary, Gujarat.

Photo: Prasad Ganpule

29. Adult female Sykes's Nightjar. The wing pattern of this female is different from the male, with only two whitish spots on the outer primaries and a buffish spot on P8. The spots on tail are not seen and the outer tail feather seems barred. Lacks white throat patch. This bird was on a nest, incubating eggs and this was a broken-wing display. March 2025, Little Rann of Kachchh, Gujarat.

Photo: Nirav Bhatt

30. Left wing of a road kill Sykes's Nightjar. Note that this individual has prominent white spots on four outer primaries (P7–P10). The outer edge of the outermost primary (P10) shows some white along with large white spots on inner and outer vane of P7. This type of wing pattern, with prominent spots on P7 is unusual. November 2013, Little Rann of Kachchh, Gujarat.

31. Juvenile male Savanna Nightjar in flight. The white outer tail feathers are clearly seen here and the white spots on four outer primaries are evident. The white throat patch is also visible. Such birds can be easily identified as males. June 2020, near Morbi, Gujarat.

All photos: Prasad Ganpule

32, 33, 34. Juvenile female Savanna Nightjars in flight showing variation in primary pattern. The top bird shows three rufous spots while the middle bird only shows some irregular spots on the outer primaries and the bottom shows three spots though the markings on P8 are smaller. All can be sexed as females based on rufous spots on primaries and lack of white outer tail feathers. The top and middle birds are likely fresh juveniles. Top – June 2025, Middle – August 2024, Bottom – August 2025, all near Morbi, Gujarat.

Nightjars have ten rectrices, with R5 being the outermost tail feather. The tail pattern is different in both species; the male Savanna Nightjar has all-white two outer pairs of rectrices with a dark tip compared to two outer tail feathers having white spots distally in the male Sykes's Nightjar. The female Sykes's has pale rufous or fulvous tinged spots in tail, similar to the male, or may lack tail spots while female Savanna lacks white in tail feathers and often has buffy edges.

In juvenile Savanna Nightjars, females have rufous spots on wings while males have white spots in the wing (which are usually smaller than in adults) and some white in outer tail feathers **[31–34]**. The number of spots varies; I have noted individuals with two or three whitish or pale rufous / buffish spots but three smaller spots are common. I noted a few (*c.*5 out of *c.*25) individuals with white on P8–P10, but with P7 having pale rufous or rufous-tinged whitish spot **[35]**. Such birds lacked white in tail and were thus sexed as females as juvenile males are known to show some white in outermost tail feather (R5). The identification as female for such birds could not be confirmed beyond doubt as I did not handle the birds and it could be missing its outermost tail feathers. The outermost tail feathers are white in juvenile male and distinctive if visible in flight.

Photo: Prasad Ganpule

35. Juvenile female? Savanna Nightjar in flight. The bird in this photograph shows three whitish primary spots with rufous edges (P8–P10) but P7 has pale rufous spot. It lacks white in tail and was sexed as a female. The lack of 'V' on scapulars makes it a juvenile. However, identification as a female requires further confirmation. June 2025, near Morbi, Gujarat.

Juvenile male Sykes's Nightjars have small white spots on wings while the females have small rufous or buffish spots. There are usually two spots on the wings in juvenile plumaged birds **[36]**. My observations of juvenile Sykes's were limited to around six or seven individuals and I could photograph only one in flight. Table 2 lists identification features of Savanna and Sykes's Nightjars.

Voice: The call of the Savanna Nightjar is a loud '*chweek*', which is quite far-carrying. When approached closer than 1.5 m, roosting flock of birds get alarmed and the closest bird to the intruder utters a soft '*chukp*' call. All the other closely roosting birds fly off with a chuckle, that sounds like a soft '*chukp*'. I heard the call of the Sykes's Nightjar only once during my study in February 2013 in Greater Rann of Kachchh, Gujarat. This call, uttered in

Photo: Prasad Ganpule

36. Juvenile Sykes's Nightjar in flight. This bird could fly short distances and shows only two small white spots on the outer primaries. Note that the white distal tail spots are apparent. A recently fledged juvenile. March 2025, Little Rann of Kachchh, Gujarat.

flight, can be described as a soft '*chuk*'. The song is described as a continuous churring (Roberts & King 2005). Voice is a reliable and diagnostic identification characteristic for both these species. However, it should be noted that there is only one recording of Sykes's call on 'eBird' and an additional two samples on 'xeno-canto' (Xeno Canto 2026). Hence, recordings of call/song of Sykes's are scarce, with just two recordings from India.

Behaviour and habitat: Both these species prefer to perch mainly on the ground and are well camouflaged with their surroundings. However, the Savanna Nightjar is sometimes seen perched on trees, electric or telephone lines, and on poles when active. The Sykes's Nightjar is more selective and mainly perches on the ground though it is known to quite rarely perch on trees. Sykes's prefers sandy and arid or semi-arid habitat, while Savanna is seen in a wide variety of habitats, but with a preference for stony areas in scrub or fallow lands in Saurashtra. This habitat choice seems to be largely based on camouflage of its plumage with the surroundings.

Moult: Adult nightjars have a single complete moult each year after breeding (Holyoak 2001). Adult Savanna Nightjars are seen in active moult in July and August. I have seen and photographed many adult Savanna in moult in these months **[37–41]**. Similarly, Sykes's Nightjar adults also moult after breeding, though I was able to see only a few birds in active moult in Gujarat in May and June. A photograph of an adult in moult from Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary is posted on 'eBird' (Kapdi 2025) while bird shown in **[9]** is in body moult.

Photo: Pankaj Maheria

37. Adult male Savanna Nightjar in active wing moult. Note the active primary moult, with new growing primaries. The white outer tail feathers as well as the mantle 'V' are visible. Birds in active moult are seen in July and August in Gujarat. August 2025, near Morbi, Gujarat.

Table 2. Identification features of Savanna and Sykes's Nightjars

Age	Sex	Species	Pattern of outer primaries	Pattern of outer tail feathers (R4–R5)	Pattern of scapulars	Pattern of wing coverts
Adult	♂	Savanna	*Four* white spots (P7–P10)	*Entirely white* with small dark tip	Shows distinct *pale orange or pale rufous 'V'* becoming whitish with wear	Distinct *pale orange or pale rufous* markings becoming whitish with wear
		Sykes's	*Three* white spots but can sometimes show four white spots (P7 or P8–P10)	*Barred* with large distal white spots	Lacks distinct pattern, same as mantle	*Pale buff or pale yellowish* markings often bordered blackish
	♀	Savanna	*Four* pale rufous to whitish spots (P7-P10)	*Banded* buff and brown, lacks white in tail	Shows *distinct pale orange or pale rufous 'V'* becoming whitish with wear	Distinct *pale orange or pale rufous* markings becoming whitish with wear
		Sykes's	*Two to three* whitish to pale rufous spots (P8 or P9–P10)	*Barred* with large distal *pale* rufous spots (sometimes can show entirely barred tail lacking spots)	Lacks distinct pattern, same as mantle	*Pale buff or pale yellowish* markings often bordered blackish
Juvenile	♂	Savanna	*Three to four* white spots (P7 or P8 – P10)	*Entirely white* with small dark tip	Mottled, lacks any distinct pattern and same as mantle	Lacks distinct markings, mottled rufous and brown
		Sykes's	*Two (sometimes three)* whitish spots – smaller than in adults (P8 or P9–P10)	*Barred* with large distal white spots	Lacks distinct pattern, same as mantle	Lacks distinct markings, mottled with pale buff, pale yellow or pale brownish
	♀	Savanna	Variable, with two to four pale rufous spots, which can be small in size (P7/P8/P9–P10)	*Banded buff and brown*, lacks white in tail	Mottled, lacks distinct pattern but is *usually more rufous than* juv ♂ and same as mantle	Lacks distinct markings, mottled rufous and brown
		Sykes's	Two (sometimes three) pale rufous spots, smaller than in adults (P8 or P9–P10)	*Barred with large distal pale rufous* spots (sometimes can show entirely barred tail lacking spots)	Lacks distinct pattern, same as mantle	Lacks distinct markings, mottled with pale buff, pale yellow or pale brownish

Both photos: Prasad Ganpule

38, 39. Adult female Savanna Nightjars in active wing moult, with one bird in active tail moult. The older primaries are whitish, tinged rufous. The spots on newly growing primaries look more rufous compared with the spots on worn primaries. Both birds lack white on retrices. The distinct 'V' on scapulars is seen, ageing them as adults. Both birds August 2025, near Morbi, Gujarat.

I have observed many juvenile Savanna Nightjars in active post-juvenile moult **[42, 43]**. Based on my observations, the body moult to adult plumage is usually completed by November, and after this, it is not possible to age the birds in the field. All birds seen in the winter, after November, showed a distinct 'V' on the scapulars, indicating adult-type plumage. However, it is possible that at this age, wing and tail may be retained from juvenile plumage. I was not able to verify this as I did not trap the birds. It is easier to identify both these species in the winter as Savanna Nightjars show typical adult type plumage, with a pale 'V' on the scapulars. While I was not able to study post-juvenile moult in Sykes's Nightjars, there are photographs of Sykes's in post-juvenile moult in June from Gujarat, which is given here **[44]**.

Both photos: Prasad Ganpule

40, 41. Adult female Savanna Nightjar in active body moult, perched and in flight. Note that this bird is in active body moult. The worn white scapulars contrast with the rufous newly grown scapulars. In flight, the scapulars on the left are rufous when compared with the worn, whitish scapulars on the right. This photo illustrates how worn feathers become whitish with wear. July 2025, near Morbi, Gujarat.

Both photos: Prasad Ganpule

42, 43. Juvenile Savanna Nightjars in post-juvenile moult. Both birds shown here are in active post-juvenile moult. A mix of new adult-type and juvenile feathers can be seen. The bird at the [bottom] has freshly grown scapulars and wing covert feathers while bird at the [top] is missing some tertials. Such juveniles in moult are seen in July–August. **[42]** in July 2021 and **[43]** in August 2010, both near Morbi, Gujarat.

Photo: V. Neeraja

44. Juvenile Sykes's Nightjar in post-juvenile moult. This juvenile shows a few adult-type feathers on the wing coverts and scapulars. Note that the overall plumage is still juvenile, pale sandy-grey. It lacks the prominent dark markings on the crown. June 2025, Nal Sarovar Bird Sanctuary, Gujarat.

Discussion

I establish that the plumage features of Savanna and Syke's Nightjars are more similar than is currently documented in contemporary literature (Ali & Ripley 1983, Kazmierczak 2000, Cleere 2010, Grimmett et al. 2011, Rasmussen & Anderton 2012, Cleere & Kirwan 2020). Identification of all adult plumages may not be possible without a careful study of wing and tail pattern, particularly when worn plumage is involved. Juvenile Savanna and Sykes's are even more similar and yet variable. They can lack any distinct plumage markings to aid identification. Hence, identification might usually depend on overall plumage tone and size.

Wing pattern: Ali & Ripley (1983), Kazmierczak (2000), Cleere (2010), and Cleere & Kirwan (2020) have stated that white spots are present on three outer primaries in Sykes's Nightjar. Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) mention that this species has "very large, rounded white patch in outer primaries" without giving the number of primaries on which white spots are present. While it is true that most male Sykes's show white spots on three outer primaries, the wing of a male shown here in **[30]** shows distinct white spots on four outer primaries and is thus similar to Savanna. Another individual shown here has prominent white spots on three primaries but also has a small white spot on the fourth primary **[28]**. Holyoak (2001) stated that in male Sykes's, primaries P7–P10 have a white patch though this could be missing on P7 or can be suffused with rufous-buff, while on P10, white is sometimes restricted only on inner web. But, in photographs showing the wings given here, some white is present on the outer web of P10 along with a large white spot on the inner web. According to Holyoak (2001), P8–P10 of a female Syke's have mainly rufous-buff spots, though some females may show 'much white' spots. Roberts (1991) mentions male as well as female Sykes's as having clear white spots on three primaries, with the male sometimes showing white on outer web of a fourth primary. However, the female in **[29]** shows white spots only on two primaries. Thus, as I found, there are discordances between the reference texts, indicating this feature is not constant. More individuals may need to be studied to verify if these differences are age-related. It is possible that few birds, perhaps older individuals, may show prominent spots on four outer primaries as shown by the wing of the individual depicted here.

It was noted in this study that in worn plumage, usually in late May and June, adult female Savanna Nightjar shows whitish spots on wings, which may or may not be tinged rufous. This is not stated in literature. The reference texts (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012; Cleere & Boesman 2023) give adult female Savanna Nightjar as having pale rufous or buffish wing spots. State of plumage could influence colour of primary spots in both these species. Similarly, as can be seen in **[6]**, the wing covert markings also become whitish with wear and in this worn plumage, Savanna can lack the typical rufous markings on the wing coverts, showing some pale rufous in only few wing coverts. In juvenile Savanna in fresh plumage, the female is usually more rufous overall than the male, and as seen in some photographs here, often there is a rufous cast to the plumage.

Juvenile plumages: Holyoak (2001) stated that young Sykes's Nightjars are paler than adults, with dark markings and white throat patches less pure and young males have white on P7–P10, differing from female in the same way as adults. Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) have given basic descriptions for juveniles of both species; the upperparts of the juvenile Savanna Nightjar are mentioned to be "very pale with uniform rufous-tinged grey upperparts finely speckled dark" while upperparts of juvenile Sykes's is described as "very pale overall, with a few tiny black speckles above".

However, there is extensive variation in juvenile Savanna Nightjar and Sykes's Nightjar as seen from the photographs presented here and more studies are required to document the full extent of plumage in juveniles of both these species. Spots on primaries as an identification feature for both these species in juvenile plumage is probably not diagnostic. However, it is still useful in combination with the tail pattern. If the tail is seen well, then the pattern in juvenile males of both these species is diagnostic and identification becomes easier. In typical juvenile female Sykes's, the pale spots on distal part of outer tail feathers are different and separates it from juvenile female Savanna. However, if a female juvenile Sykes's does not show the typical tail spots, then identification should be concluded based on a combination of other features.

Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) mention that juvenile male has rufous-edged white spots on primaries but with white outer tail feathers. But, in individuals similar to the one depicted in **[35]**, pale rufous spot was seen on P7 while P8–P10 were whitish but with no white on tail. If these individuals are males, then it is possible that not all juvenile males have white outer tail feathers. For e.g., a male specimen (FTLB #088003) of Savanna (Munshi & Everett 2025) has rufous-edged whitish spots on three outer primaries and shows barred outer tail feathers (R5, R4), lacking any white. It is likely a juvenile, with only three spots on the outer primaries. Though it is sexed as a male, there is no white in the two outer tail feathers. According to Holyoak (2001), tail pattern of juvenile male is like an adult male, with white on inner webs of R4 or R5. In juvenile Savanna, males usually have three to four white spots on the primaries while females are variable, showing two to three rufous spots but sometimes, the rufous spots can be quite small, as shown in **[33]** here. In juvenile Sykes's, males as well as females have two to three spots, which are whitish in males and pale rufous or rufous in females. In general, juvenile Sykes's is pale buff while juvenile Savanna is darker than juvenile Sykes's, more greyish-brown or rufous-brown. In juvenile Savanna, females are generally more rufous toned than the male.

It is likely that the moult from downy, chick plumage to juvenile plumage is completed as soon as the chicks leave the nest, as some species attain juvenile plumage in the second week after hatching (Holyoak 2001). In a study in Singapore, Savanna Nightjar chicks left the nest, attaining juvenile-type plumage after *c.*16 days (Meng & Chan 2015). However, the moult from juvenile to adult plumage (the post-juvenile moult) takes longer and is more complex, and usually involves the body feathers and wing coverts but not the remiges and rectrices (Holyoak 2001). There are very few details available regarding post-juvenile moult in Sykes's Nightjars in reference texts. Hence, the observations presented here regarding moult in both these species can be used as a base for further studies.

Seasonality: Both nightjars have documented migratory patterns (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). However, these remain poorly understood and hence using seasonality information alone for identification is not recommended. For e.g., I have observed the number of roosting Savanna Nightjars to decrease markedly in the winter, from December to March, suggesting a local movement. On the other hand, the numbers of Sykes's Nightjar increase in the winter, which points to a migratory influx. In the winter, Savanna appears to be uncommon compared to other seasons in areas like Little Rann of Kachchh and other arid and semi-desert parts of Kachchh. Sykes's is more likely to be seen in these areas than the Savanna in winter but odd individuals occur and caution is recommended.

Finally, it should be noted that another potential identification issue exists for Sykes's Nightjar. It is well known that the Sykes's Nightjar is very similar to the extralimital Egyptian Nightjar *C. aegyptius,* but since the Egyptian does not occur in India, this identification problem is overlooked in our country. Cleere (2010) and Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) illustrate Sykes's Nightjar as the main confusion species for Egyptian Nightjar. The key identification feature for Egyptian is that it lacks any white spots in wings (contra Sykes's). It would be prudent to check wing and tail pattern of all Sykes's in the extreme westernmost parts of India for a vagrant Egyptian. Since plumage is identical in these species, Egyptian could be misidentified as a Sykes's if the wing and tail pattern is not seen.

Conclusion

Separation of Sykes's Nightjar from Savanna Nightjar is quite challenging, especially in juveniles. The overall plumage, and wing and tail pattern, should be carefully studied for identification. The tail pattern is an important feature for identification in adults as well as juveniles. Though difficult to obtain, flight photographs are very useful in identification of both these species in adult plumage. However, the number of primary spots is less reliable as an identification feature in juveniles. Perched birds are often difficult to identify if the wing, wing covert, and tail pattern are not visible. It is advisable that photographs showing different features be taken for correct identification.

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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-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.

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 Daripineni

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.

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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 Vijoynagar area of Changlang District on 06 January, we were birding along the Miao-Vijoynagar Road, which is a dirt track along the Noa-Dihing River. At the 62 milestone on the Miao-Vijoynagar 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.

Both photos: Bhupesh K Goyal

The Pin-tailed Parrotfinch is a recent addition to the avifauna of India, following multiple records from Mizoram (Sailo et al. 2025). Several dead individuals were recovered from hunters in November 2020 from the Tuichhuahen area of Kolasib District, and a dead male was recovered following a window collision at the Vaivakawn locality in Aizawl City. Subsequently, a live male was photographed on 04 April 2025 at the Tuisen-Tlabung forest near Reiek Village, Mamit District. Based on these records, and information obtained from local inhabitants, the species was considered resident in Mizoram by Sailo et al. (2025). Elsewhere in the neighbouring region, the species was reported from the Xishuangbanna Tropical Botanical Garden in southern Yunnan Province on 19 December 2013 and 04 January 2014, constituting the first records for China (Sreekar et al. 2014). It is also a relatively recent addition to Bhutan's avifauna, following its sighting in Phibsoo Wildlife Sanctuary on 16 July 2018 (Wagdi & Tenzin 2021).

The Pin-tailed Parrotfinch is a popular cage bird owing to its attractive plumage and ease of maintenance, and granivorous diet (Sreekar et al. 2014; Donald et al. 2024). Consequently, recent Indian records could be suspected to involve escapees. However, our sighting occurred in dense forest far from human habitation. Similarly, earlier records from Mizoram were from forested habitats and adjoining rice fields, with multiple birds recorded from Tuichhuahen (Sailo et al. 2025). The species was also reported as being familiar to local hunters, trappers, and farmers in Mizoram. These factors led to its acceptance as a wild species in India, and its inclusion in the Indian Checklist (Praveen & Jayapal 2026).

The species primarily inhabits forest edges, secondary growth, and bamboo-dominated landscapes, and frequently visits rice fields from the lowlands up to c. 1,500 m elevation (Payne 2020). The habitat in which the species was observed at Namdapha National Park closely matches this description, being dominated by bamboo with flowering. Notably, records from Mizoram, Bhutan, and China were all from habitats with a significant bamboo component. Although largely resident within its core range, the species is partially migratory and nomadic, wandering over large areas and moving seasonally in response to rice harvesting and bamboo seeding events (Payne 2020). It typically occurs in small flocks, consistent with our observation of multiple individuals. Taken together, these ecological and behavioural attributes strongly suggest that the present record involves wild birds rather than escapees.

This sighting constitutes the first record of the Pin-tailed Parrotfinch for Arunachal Pradesh. The recent records from Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram suggest a possible ongoing northward expansion in the distribution range of the species. The recent records from China, which also lie north of its previously known range, further support this hypothesis. With the increase in birding activity in India, both in frequency and geographic coverage, a growing number of observers are contributing to new discoveries. This has resulted in the steady addition of species to India's avifauna. It is also possible that the species has always been nomadic, occasionally straying into under-explored regions beyond its known distribution range, and may have gone undetected in the past. We anticipate that further sightings of this species will be made in India, particularly in states bordering Myanmar. Observers are encouraged to remain vigilant during periods of bamboo flowering, as the species shows a strong affinity towards it.

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Passage migration of European Bee-eaters *Merops apiaster* through Rajasthan and other parts of India

The European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster* is the most widespread bee-eater of the family Meropidae. Its breeding range extends from Portugal in the west to Mongolia and western China in the east, and from Denmark in the north, to North Africa in the south. A disjunct breeding population also occurs in South Africa, Namibia, and Botswana (Bastian & Bastian 2024). The species winters predominantly in central, western, and southern Africa, with widely scattered migratory pathways that connect breeding and wintering areas (Bastian & Bastian 2024). In South Asia, a small breeding population of the species occurs in Kashmir at elevations of 900–2100 m asl (Bates & Lowther 1952; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012) in Budgam, Srinagar, and Pulwama Districts (Ansar Ahmad, in litt., email dated 29 June 2025). A small number winter in Sri Lanka and along the Kaveri River in southern Karnataka and northern Tamil Nadu in India (Praveen 2025).

Although all populations are migratory, their migration routes remain poorly understood, particularly of those populations breeding in the eastern range (e.g., China, Mongolia, and Kashmir). The presence of wintering birds in southern India and Sri Lanka suggests the use of Central Asian-Indian Flyway (Bastian & Bastian 2024). Ali & Ripley (1983) referred to only one sighting of the species in Salem District, Tamil Nadu in 1952 based on Roy (1969). Later, a small flock of 5–7 birds were reported from Kanakapuram District, Karnataka in early 1980s (Lott 1985). Shyamal (1998) noted the increasing regularity of their sightings

from "the Kaveri River belt and elsewhere" in southern India. Over the years, sightings of European Bee-eaters have become rather common in the region between Mysuru and Bengaluru in Karnataka and Salem and Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu, with large flocks occasionally reported (Praveen 2025).

European Bee-eaters migrate using both active flapping flight and soaring/gliding on thermals (Fry & Fry 1992). Sapir et al (2010) emphasized their preference for soaring flight. However, the magnitude, timing, seasonal duration or daily pattern of their passage migration in the Indian Subcontinent, both in spring (February–April) and autumn (August–December), remain poorly documented. In this note we report, and briefly discuss the two recent sightings of the species in Rajasthan during spring migration and four other recent passage records of the species from Punjab, Delhi, Maharashtra, and Karnataka.

On 26 March 2024 at 1030 h, a flock of 13–14 bee-eaters was observed hawking insects over crop fields near Fatehpur (27.979°N, 74.950°E), Sikar District, Rajasthan (Sangha 2024). The flock was detected due to their incessant musical calls and a careful observation through binoculars confirmed them as European Bee-eaters rather than Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters *M. persicus*, a common summer breeding visitor to western Rajasthan. The birds were observed for *c.*10 minutes. On 02 April 2025, about 8–10 European Bee-eaters were observed and photographed from Harsh (27.488°N, 75.180°E) by DM while they were flying towards Revasa Lake, Sikar District (Maharshi 2025). The images were shared with HSS who confirmed the birds as European Bee-eaters **[49]**.

Photo: Dipendra Maharshi

49. European Bee-eater photographed from Harsh, Sikar District, Rajasthan on 02 April 2025.

These observations confirm that European Bee-eaters undertake spring passage migration through Rajasthan. The timing of these records strongly suggest that the birds had wintered in southern India or further south in Sri Lanka (Fig. 1) and were returning to their breeding areas in Kashmir or further north.

It is worth noting that HSS has been residing and actively birding in Rajasthan for more than four decades and spent one year (1983–84) in Sikar District but never sighted the species. DM has been birding in Sikar since 2019 but never recorded the species earlier. Quite possibly the species is an uncommon or scarce passage migrant in north-western India. Its tendency to migrate at high altitudes (Fry & Fry 1992; Tippett 2024), possibly accounting for the scarcity of records. We could not find any other published records of the species from Rajasthan, nor are there eBird records from the state.

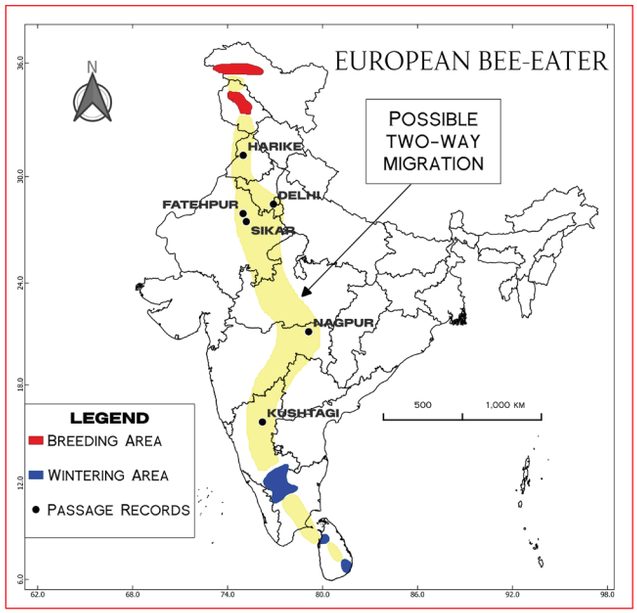

Fig. 1. Map depicting a possible two-way migration route of European Bee-eaters between their wintering and breeding grounds in India and Sri Lanka.

The nearest passage record of the species to Sikar is from Najafgarh Jheel near Delhi where seven birds were recorded on 03 April 2022 (Sharma 2022). There is one record from Central India, from Telhara reservoir, Nagpur, Maharashtra on 28 March 2013 (Kulkarni 2013). A flock of 12 birds was observed on 08 March 2015 in northern Karnataka (Ashrit 2015). A juvenile bird was seen on 01 September 1996, east of the Harike Bird Sanctuary at Rababsar in Punjab (Per Undeland, in litt., email dated 02 June 2025; Robson 1997). Due to paucity of passage records from India, possible migration times and routes are still not known for birds wintering in southern India and Sri Lanka. However, these few available observations nevertheless support the Central Asian-Indian Flyway hypothesis, although no observations were made in Delhi in the 1940s (Hutson 1947). It can be presumed that there is a two-way migration between the wintering areas in southern India and Sri Lanka and breeding areas of Kashmir or areas further north. A complete story is expected to unravel soon, as more birders record them during passage in India.

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Breeding of the Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola* at Ujani Reservoir, Maharashtra, India

The Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola* is one of the three species of the genus *Glareola,* found in India. It is distributed across southern Europe, northern Africa, the Middle East, and parts of Central Asia (Maclean & Kirwan, 2020). In South Asia, the species is a breeding visitor to the Indus Valley in Pakistan (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012), whereas in India, it breeds in Gujarat while spreads thinly in peninsular India during non-breeding season. Inland reports from northern and central India, Deccan as well as Andamans are likely to be birds in migration (Praveen 2025). The species typically nests colonially in small groups of 10–20 in open, flat habitats near water and breeds from April–August (Maclean & Kirwan 2020).

Ujani Reservoir is located in the Solapur and Pune Districts of the Maharashtra State, with parts of it extending into Ahilyanagar District (Fig. 1). It supports a diverse range of habitats, including deep waters, shorelines, marshland, and riparian zones, which are essential for both resident and migratory bird species. During dry season, the water recedes, exposing the submerged land that transforms into large stretches of grassy meadows which attracts several ground-nesting waterbirds such as plovers *Charadridae sp.*, Black-winged Stilts *Himantopus himantopus*, pratincoles, and lapwings *Vanellus sp.*.

We first recorded four Collared Pratincoles at Takali (18.255°N, 74.865°E) on 03 March 2024 and another four on 06 April at Kondhar Chincholi (18.280°N, 74.815°E). During its breeding season in the year 2024, we observed an adult bird carrying food, a behaviour suggesting parental care and presence of dependent young. Chicks were observed accompanying adults in May 2024 at Kalewadi (18.242°N, 74.862°E) **[50]**, though no nest was located.

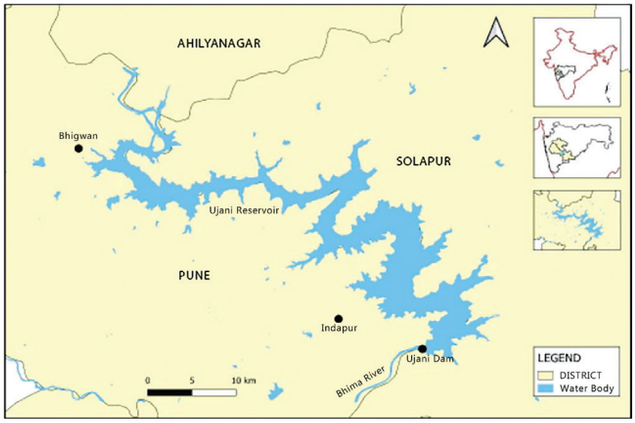

Fig. 1. Map showing the location of Ujani Reservoir in Maharashtra, India.

In the year 2025, the species was recorded much earlier than in 2024. Three individuals were seen at Vitthalwadi (18.322°N, 74.854°E) on 09 February 2025, and ten two days later at the same location. On 31 March 2025, 26 individuals were recorded from Takali. Since then, they were regularly observed at Takali and Kalewadi, both these locations being on opposite banks of the reservoir, mainly on freshly exposed grassy meadows formed by receding water.

On 25 April 2025, while surveying at Kalewadi, we came across a nest of an Oriental Pratincole *G. maldivarum* with two eggs, being incubated by an adult bird. After scanning the area further, we saw a shallow scrape nest on the ground with two similarly patterned eggs, but no adult bird was seen near the nest. However, an adult pair of Collared Pratincole was seen nearby along with Oriental Pratincoles. Continued observation from a safe distance following nesting biology guidelines (Barve et al. 2010) showed an adult Collared Pratincole returning to the scrape and incubating the eggs **[51]**. The nest of Collared Pratincole was only 31 m away from the nest of an Oriental Pratincole. This is the first direct evidence of nesting of the Collared Pratincole in India outside its known breeding range.

These repeated observations over two years suggest that Collared Pratincoles may be regular breeding visitors to Ujani, but overlooked due to their similarity with Oriental Pratincoles. This finding considerably extends the known breeding distribution of the species into the Deccan Plateau and highlights the ecological importance of large, seasonally fluctuating wetlands for supporting ground-nesting birds.

Photo: Swapnil Jarad

50. Adult Collared Pratincole with a chick photographed in May 2024 at Kalewadi, Ujani Reservoir, Maharashtra.

Photo: Ameya Deshpande

51. Collared Pratincole nest with two eggs and an adult bird incubating the eggs at Kalewadi, Maharashtra.

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The Jerdon's Bushlark *Plocealauda affinis* from Goa, India

Goa, though India's smallest state (0.12% of India's land area), supports a disproportionately rich avian diversity, with 489 species recorded (Baidya & Bhagat 2024). This figure represents approximately 35% of India's bird species and is likely attributable to Goa's varied landscapes, ranging from coastal wetlands and estuaries to inland forests and lateritic plateaus. The Socorro Plateau in North Goa is a notable birding site and this note reports the first confirmed sighting of Jerdon's Bushlark from the state of Goa.

Socorro Plateau (15.568°N, 73.838°E; 50–90 m asl), with an area of 3.5 sq. km., is located in North Goa District (TessaDEM 2024) (Fig. 1). It comprises a low-level Ferricretes (LLF) type of flat lateritic plateau (Watve 2013), dominated by grass species interspersed with sparse scrub vegetation, providing suitable habitat for various grassland-associated species. To the south, it is bordered by the Salvador do Mundo Plateau, characterized by dense shrub and tree cover. On 13 August 2024, during a reconnaissance visit to the habitat, three larks were observed flying over and settling in an open grassy patch of land at a spot (15.566°N, 73.840°E; 72 m asl). Two individuals were identified as Malabar Lark *Galerida malabarica*, a species frequently encountered in the region. However, the third bird displayed morphological differences that prompted closer scrutiny. A photograph was obtained **[52]**; however, the bird remained silent and was visible very briefly. Identification was based on the following morphological features: heavily streaked upperparts, buff underparts, short tail, prominent rufous colour on the wings, buffy lores, and a large, thickset bill with a dark upper and pale lower mandible (Grimmett et al. 2011). The photograph was later shared on Facebook and, subsequently, the identification was confirmed (Damle 2024).

Photo: Omkar Damle

52. Jerdon's Bushlark at Socorro Plateau, Goa, 13 August 2024.

The Jerdon's Bushlark occurs in southern and eastern India and Sri Lanka, and is a resident species that breeds from December to May, chiefly from March onwards, in India; and from March to August or September, mainly May, in Sri Lanka (Alström 2020). It is typically associated with drier regions, and inhabits a variety of open landscapes, including grasslands, scrublands, agricultural fields, rocky plains, and forest edges. While it is resident in peninsular India, it has also been documented from, as far north as, Bastar in Chhattisgarh, and Midnapore in West Bengal (Dinda & Das 2018; Bharos et al. 2019).

The Jerdon's Bushlark is not listed in the available checklists for Goa and citizen science databases (Baidya & Bhagat 2024; eBird 2025; iNaturalist 2025). Thus, our record of the species at Socorro Plateau represents an important addition to the avifauna of Goa. While this species is well documented in southern India, its prior absence from Goa is intriguing. In Maharashtra, there are only two confirmed records, both from the plains in the northern (Patil 2023) and north-eastern (Babre 2018) areas. From Karnataka, while there are sparse records close to the border between Goa and Karnataka (Prabhu 2021; Kalkura 2022; Bharathi 2024; Rai 2025), regular records are reported from the southern coastal plains (for e.g., in Udupi, Mangaluru etc.), and inland tablelands (for e.g., in Bengaluru, Mysuru,

etc.) (eBird 2025). Based on its known habitat preferences and current distribution, it is apparent that the species typically avoids the hilly and forested terrains of the Western Ghats, but prefers flat, open plateaus. Based on this, the Western Ghats ranges of Goa may be hypothesised as a possible geographical distribution barrier for this non-migratory species. Specifically, the areas at the east-west projections of the Western Ghats, such as, near Canaguinim (15.099°N, 73.988°E; 99 m asl) and Agonda (15.054°N, 74.017°E; 145 m asl) in Goa, as well as near Karwar (14.794°N, 74.313°E; 105 m asl) in Karnataka, which extend close to the coastline. These densely forested hill ranges may possibly restrict or obstruct the movement of dryland species like Jerdon's Bushlark, resulting in likely sporadic or isolated records from the coastal flats of Goa and adjacent regions. Alternatively, the apparent absence of records in these regions may probably stem from biases in coverage, resulting in this small and somewhat visually cryptic species being potentially unnoticed or misidentified. This highlights the importance of consistent, systematic, and targeted surveys to more accurately detect and document species presence and abundance. Furthermore, this record highlights the ecological significance of lateritic plateaus as important habitats for open-country birds, emphasizing the need for focused efforts to protect these unique ecosystems.

We thank Nester Brian Fernandes for field assistance and for insights into the Socorro Plateau habitat. We are grateful to Mangirish Dharwadkar for recognizing the significance of our record and encouraging its documentation, and to Ashwin Viswanathan and Adesh Shivkar for their valuable assistance in species identification.

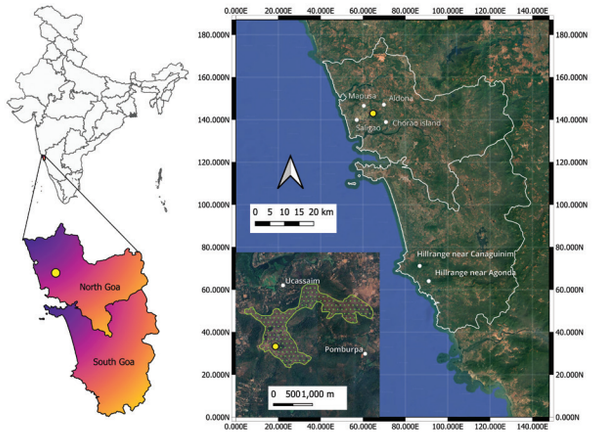

Fig. 1. Location map of the Socorro Plateau, showing the approximate site of the observation on 13 August 2024 (indicated by a solid yellow circle). Plateau boundaries are outlined in green. Map created using QGIS Desktop v3.34.12. Map by Omkar Damle

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The Grey-crowned Prinia *Prinia cinereocapilla* from Valmiki Tiger Reserve, Bihar, India

The Grey-crowned Prinia *Prinia cinereocapilla* is endemic to the Indian Subcontinent, and found discontinuously from the Himalayan foothills of Uttarakhand to Bhutan (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). This species is listed as globally Vulnerable by the IUCN and only patchily occurs outside the protected areas, both in Nepal and India (Birdlife International 2025). Here, I record it from the Valmiki Tiger Reserve, Bihar.

On 27 December 2024, while birding in Gobardhana Range (27.351°N, 84.307°E) of the Valmiki Tiger Reserve, I heard several *tree-eei* calls from grassy hill slopes in forest. The overall habitat was broadleaved evergreen forest with hilly ravines and grassy hill slopes. Approaching closer, I found four rufous-brown prinias with slaty-grey caps calling and moving in *Thysanolaena* grasses that occur in the understorey of this forest. Prinias were very close to me, an they had a small rufous-brown patch above their bill and front of head, slaty-grey crown, and creamy white supercilium. With their unique calls, it was straightforward to identify them as Grey-crowned Prinias in non-breeding plumage. Unfortunately, I could not take any pictures that day.

On 29 March 2025, I again encountered Grey-crowned Prinias in same habitat in Gobardhana Range. In fact, their calls were being heard all over *Thysanolaena latifolia* grass in the understorey. This time, I photographed three different individuals **[53, 54]** and saw nearly 11 different individuals calling and foraging. Some prinias were acquiring their breeding plumages while others were yet to acquire the breeding plumage.

Since then, I have searched all habitats of Valmiki Tiger Reserve in past two years but have not come across the species in any other habitat. Hence, I presume that the supporting habitat of the Grey-crowned Prinia in Valmiki Tiger Reserve is limited to hilly slopes of Gobardhana Range or any other site within the tiger reserve where such a habitat occurs. No other prinias were encountered in this particular habitat.

53. A Grey-crowned Prinia in non-breeding plumage foraging in Thysanolaena understorey of the forest.

Both photos: Abhishek Sharma

54. A Grey-crowned Prinia almost turning into non-breeding plumage showing grey crown and white eyebrow

The Grey-crowned Prinia has not been reported from Valmiki Tiger Reserve or other parts of Bihar previously (Ali & Ripley 1987; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012; Praveen 2025). However, Maheswaran et al.(2025) recently reported a few birds from Valmiki Tiger Reserve. However, its presence is hardly surprising as the species occur in the adjacent Chitwan (Gurung 1983; Baral 2001) and Parsa National Parks (Inskipp et al. 2016) in Nepal. However, it escalates the importance of trans-national parks such as Chitwan–Parsa (Nepal) and Valmiki Tiger Reserve (India) as just not vital for charismatic megafauna but also immensely important for bird conservation. These interconnected landscapes support a diverse avifauna, including migratory, endemic, and globally threatened bird species which move between these contiguous habitats. Governments from both countries should strengthen conservation in the Indo-Nepal border to sustain the habitats of such globally Vulnerable species.

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The Tibetan Partridge *Perdix hodgsoniae* in western Arunachal Pradesh, India

The Tibetan Partridge *Perdix hodgsoniae* is a high-altitude species endemic to the Tibetan Plateau and the adjoining Himalayan ranges. In India, the species has been reliably recorded from Ladakh and parts of Himachal Pradesh (Ali & Ripley 1983; Grimmett et al. 2011). Historical reports from Arunachal Pradesh exist, including a mention by Ludlow & Kinnear (1937) from the Mago area in the Goshu Chu valley. However, their published account does not indicate the collection of voucher specimens from that locality, and we have not been able to trace any such specimens in accessible collections. It remains possible that material exists in museum holdings that we have not examined. They also mentioned collecting *Perdix* specimens on the Bhutan side during this expedition, though it remains unclear whether any were obtained from the present day Indian side. Later references (Ali & Ripley 1983; Grimmett et al. 2011) cite the species' possible presence in Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh. While historical reports exist, our sighting constitutes the first substantiated photographic record of the Tibetan Partridge from Arunachal Pradesh. In this context, our observations from the Thembang-Bapu landscape in West Kameng district provide photographic documentation of the species' occurrence in Arunachal Pradesh and contribute to a more robust understanding of its distribution in the eastern Himalayas.

The Thembang-Bapu area is situated in the western part of Arunachal Pradesh, within the Eastern Himalayas, and lies between elevations of 3,000–5,500 m asl. The habitat comprises alpine grasslands, boulder-strewn slopes, and high-altitude shrublands. Field surveys were carried out during Snow Leopard *Panthera uncia* population estimation exercises conducted by the Arunachal Pradesh Forest Department between April-May and August-September 2021, and again in May-June and September-October 2022. Our base camp was established at Potok (*c.*4,200 m asl), a Brokpa herding settlement accessed via a three-day trek from Bishum Phudung.

During these surveys, we observed small groups of swift-moving partridges in open alpine scrub. Initially presumed to be Chukar Partridges *Alectoris chukar*, closer field observations and photographic evidence **[55]** revealed diagnostic characters consistent with Tibetan Partridge: slightly larger body, compact structure, and distinctive black-and-white barring on the flanks and underparts. Key sightings were made on 13 September 2022 near 27.621°N, 92.391°E.

The bird was recorded on rocky alpine slopes interspersed with dwarf rhododendron and dry grass patches. Individuals were skittish, preferring to run for cover rather than fly. Tibetan

Photo: Lobsang Serap

55. Tibetan Partridge.

Partridge is listed as Least Concern on the IUCN Red List (BirdLife International 2025), but in India it is protected under Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. This record confirms the species' presence in the easternmost extent of the Indian Himalayas and underscores the ornithological significance of the Thembang-Bapu landscape. Continued avifaunal surveys in this under-explored region may reveal additional range extensions of other high-altitude species.(Ali & Ripley 1983)

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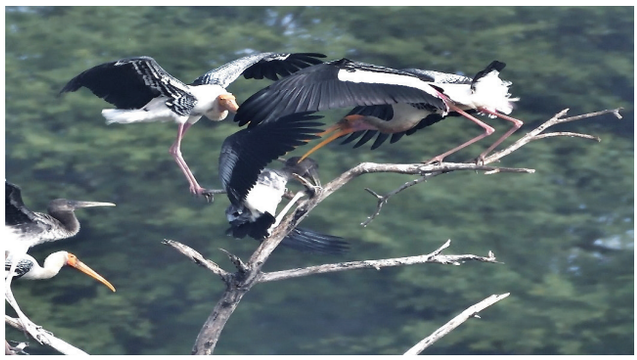
Intraspecific aggression exhibited by adult Painted Storks *Mycteria leucocephala* towards an immature at Chawandiya Wetland, Bhilwara, Rajasthan, India

The Painted Stork *Mycteria leucocephala* is a large wading bird belonging to the family Ciconiidae and is widely distributed across South Asia, including Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, and parts of Southeast Asia (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). The species typically inhabits wetlands, lakes, and shallow water bodies where it feeds mainly on fish but may also consume frogs, reptiles, crustaceans, and aquatic insects (Elliott et al. 2020). Painted Storks breed colonially, and usually nesting on medium-sized trees near wetlands and water bodies (Urfi 2011). Several breeding colonies of Painted Storks have been documented across India in both protected wetlands and human-dominated landscapes. In western India, the states of Gujarat and Rajasthan support several nesting colonies due to the presence of suitable wetlands and nesting trees. In this note, we document the behaviour and social interactions of the species showing intraspecific aggression between adults and an immature at a wetland in Bhilwara District, Rajasthan.

From August 2024 to January 2025, we conducted regular observations of a Painted Stork breeding colony at Chawandiya Mata Pond (25.331° N, 74.775° E; 420 m asl) in Bhilwara District, Rajasthan. The wetland is surrounded by *Vachellia nilotica* trees that provide suitable nesting sites for several colonial waterbirds. In addition to Painted Storks, other species, such as, Eurasian Spoonbills *Platalea leucorodia* and Little Cormorants *Microcarbo niger* were also observed using the site. The colony was visited once every week during the breeding season to document nesting behaviour. Observations were conducted using Vanguard FR-1650 binoculars, and photographs were taken using a Nikon D500 camera mounted on a tripod. During the survey period, several breeding activities were recorded, including nest construction, courtship behaviour, mating, egg incubation, feeding, and parental care.

On 22 December 2025, at 1030 h, during a routine observation of the breeding colony, an aggressive interaction involving adult Painted Storks and an immature individual was observed. The immature bird was perched on a branch of a *V. nilotica* tree within the nesting colony, close to an active nest. An adult Painted Stork was then observed approaching the immature individual and began pecking its head and neck. Shortly afterwards, a second adult joined the interaction. Both adults repeatedly pecked at the immature individual and attempted to displace it from the branch. The adults would also spread their wings, likely showing dominance or aggression, and struck the immature bird with their bills during the interaction. The immature bird attempted to avoid the attack by moving along the branch and lowering its body posture. However, the adults continued the aggressive interaction for *c.* 30–40 sec. During the encounter, the immature bird was also observed to briefly loose its balance while attempting to evade the attacking adults. The event was photographed, and images were obtained showing the adults attacking the immature bird **[56, 57]**. Following the interaction, the immature bird moved away from the immediate nesting branch, and was no longer



56. Close-up of the adult Painted Storks attacking an immature bird.

Both photos: Farhat Zabi

57. Adult Painted Storks attacking an immature bird.

clearly visible due to dense foliage and the movement of birds within the colony. Consequently, the subsequent condition of the immature bird could not be confirmed.

Aggressive interactions among individuals are commonly observed in colonial breeding birds, particularly in dense nesting colonies where adults defend nesting territories and compete for space (Gopi & Pandav 2007; Urfi 2011). Such behaviour may occur when immature or non-breeding individuals approach active nesting areas. Although infanticide has been documented in several bird species, confirmed reports in Painted Storks remain limited. The present observation therefore highlights an instance of intense intraspecific aggression by adults directed towards an immature individual within a breeding colony. Further observations may help clarify the ecological factors influencing such behaviour in colonial waterbirds.

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The Common Swift *Apus apus* from Phansad Wildlife Sanctuary: An addition to the Maharashtra avifauna

The Common Swift *Apus apus* is a long-distance migrant that breeds across Europe and Asia and winters in sub-Saharan Africa (Chantler & Driessens 2000; Kirwan et al. 2025). In South Asia, it is mainly a passage migrant, particularly during post-breeding movements from August to September (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012a). In India, the species breeds in Gilgit, Ladakh, Kashmir, and Himachal Pradesh in the western Himalaya. During passage, it is widespread across the southern peninsula and the Lakshadweep Islands (Praveen 2025).

On 04 August 2024, during a preliminary survey for the "Biodiversity Counts" programme under the "Sustainable Phansad" project by Green Works Trust (in partnership with SBI Foundation and Maharashtra Forest Department's Thane Wildlife Division), NB and AS found a dead swift in Phansad Wildlife Sanctuary, near Supegaon village in Murud *Taluka*, Raigad District, Maharashtra (18.424°N, 72.944°E). The specimen was photographed and examined with permission from the Forest Range Officer. It was identified by NB as a juvenile Common Swift, based on its blackish-brown plumage, scaly back, deeply forked tail, whitish chin and throat, and whiter forehead with extensive pale scaling on the underparts (Grimmett et al. 2011; Manakadan et al. 2011) **[58, 59]**. Similar looking Blyth's Swift *A. leuconyx* was excluded due to the clearly demarcated pale throat patch contrasting with darker surrounding plumage and lack of white rump (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012b; Chantler & Driessens 2000). The biometric data of the specimen are provided in Table 1.

58. Dead specimen of juvenile Common Swift from Phansad Wildlife Sanctuary, Maharashtra. Whitish chin and throat, whiter forehead can be seen.

59. Common Swift having whitish brown body, deeply forked tail, and scaly back.

Both photos: Adhiya Soman

Table 1. Biometrics of the specimen recovered from Phansad Wildlife Sanctuary, Maharashtra

Body part	Handbook (Ali & Ripley 1983)	Specimen from Thaikadappuram, Kerela (Karuthedathu et al. 2014)	Current Specimen
Wings	160–180 mm	165 mm	174 mm
Wingspan	-	370 mm	372 mm
Tail	66–77 mm	70.5 mm	68 mm
Tarsus	10 mm	10.17 mm	12 mm

There is one unconfirmed report of this species from Lonavala, Pune District, Maharashtra on 10 November 2002 (Prasad 2006). The present note documents the first confirmed record of the species from Maharashtra.The previous confirmed records of Common Swift from Peninsular India are from the states of Gujarat, Goa, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, and Lakshadweep (Karuthedathu et al. 2014; Aju et al. 2019; eBird 2025). Given previous unconfirmed report from Maharashtra, the species may have been overlooked in the region. This record raises the possibility of an under-reported migration route along the northern Western Ghats and adjacent coastal plains.

We thank Mr. Tushar Kalbhor (Range Forest Officer, Phansad Wildlife Sanctuary, and holding additional charge as Assistant Conservator of Forests, Phansad Wildlife Sanctuary and Karnala Bird Sanctuary) for granting permission to carry the specimen from the sanctuary for identification. We are grateful to Mr. Sunil Limaye, former PCCF (Wildlife), Maharashtra, for his guidance in publishing this note. We sincerely thank Ashwin Viswanathan for his valuable inputs on the manuscript. We also thank Sagar Satpute (Head Projects, Green Works Trust) and Praveen J. for their constructive suggestions on the manuscript. We acknowledge Akash Mhaisdhune, Shivani Pujari, and Sonam

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The Chinese Pond-Heron *Ardeola bacchus*: Addition to the avifauna of Maharashtra and Jammu & Kashmir

The Chinese Pond-Heron *Ardeola bacchus* closely resembles the more widespread Indian Pond-Heron *A. grayii*, particularly in non-breeding and immature plumages. However, it is slightly larger by 8–10 cm, and the distinctive breeding plumage allows for reliable separation from the Indian Pond-Heron only during the breeding period. Chinese Pond-Heron breeds in eastern Asia, including north-eastern India, China, Russia, Japan, and Myanmar (Martínez-Vilalta et al. 2020). Northern populations migrate southward post-breeding, while southern populations (Indian and Indochinese) are largely sedentary (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). The species is known for a certain degree of vagrancy as it has been recorded from distant regions such as Alaska, Norway, Australia, and Sri Lanka (Martínez-Vilalta et al. 2020). In India, it is rare outside its north-eastern stronghold, with isolated reports from Bhavnagar, Gujarat (Parasharya, 1983), Tal Chhapar Wildlife Sanctuary, Rajasthan (Poonia et al. 2013), Pauri Garhwal, Uttarakhand (Bisht et al. 2024) and multiple records from West Bengal, Odisha, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala (eBird 2025). In north-western India, the species has been reported from Qurumber National Park, Gilgit-Baltistan (Khan et al. 2015). Here we report two incidences of its sighting outside of its usual range.

Nandur Madhmeshwar Bird Sanctuary, Nasik, Maharashtra

On 27 April 2025 at 0900 h, during a return migration bird-watch at Nandur Madhmeshwar Bird Sanctuary, first Ramsar site of the state (19.983°N, 74.030°E), in Nasik District Maharashtra, AM and other birders photographed an unfamiliar pond-heron. After scanning the images of bird by the authors it was confirmed as a Chinese Pond-Heron **[60]**. The bird was in full breeding plumage, with maroon-chestnut head, long lanceolate plumes from the nape, a dark slaty back, and white under parts. The bird was seen again on the following two mornings in the same area. This constitutes the first record of Chinese Pond-Heron, with photographic evidence from the state of Maharashtra, India.

Wular Lake, Jammu & Kashmir

On 06 May 2025, while birding near Wular Lake (34.363°N, 74.650°E; 1680 m asl) in Jammu & Kashmir, SM observed a pond-heron foraging near a reed patch at 1350 h. The bird appeared slightly larger and noticeably different from the more common Indian Pond-Heron in the area. Upon photographing the individual, SM was excited to confirm its identity as an adult Chinese Pond-Heron. The bird was in full breeding plumage, characterized by a maroon-chestnut head, slaty-black mantle, white underparts, a black-tipped bill, and a prominent yellow orbital patch **[61]**. There were no previous records of this species from Jammu & Kashmir before this sighting and it is included in the bird checklist of Jammu & Kashmir (Kichloo et al. 2024; Kichloo 2025) based on this observation.

These observations suggest that the species may be more widespread in western and north-western India than previously thought and highlight the importance of continued bird monitoring in the region. Birders in these areas are encouraged to be vigilant for further occurrences of this species.

Photo: Rajendra Thakare

60. Chinese Pond-Heron photographed at Nandur Madhmeshwar Bird Sanctuary, Maharashtra on 27 April 2025.

Photo: Showkat Maqbool

61. Chinese Pond-Heron photographed from Wular Lake, Jammu & Kashmir on 06 May 2025.

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Nesting association between 'Eastern' Finn's Weavers *Ploceus megarhynchus salimalii* and Black Drongos *Dicrurus macrocercus*

During the 2025 nesting season, we documented an active breeding colony of the 'Eastern' Finn's Weaver *Ploceus megarhynchus salimali* in the Kanchanbari grassland of the Bhuyanpara Range, Manas National Park, Assam. Nesting was first observed in early April on a *Premna bengalensis* tree (26.747°N, 91.100°E), at a height of seven m; however, the site was soon abandoned. A larger colony was established shortly after on a nearby *Vitex glabrata* tree (26.746°N, 91.102°E), at a height of five m, and the colony grew to 27 nests by mid-May. Male display, nest weaving, and female nest inspections were observed. The nesting tree was surrounded by *Saccharum narenga, Imperata cylindrica, Phragmites karka,* and *Alpinia nigra.* **[62, 63]**.

62. Finn's Weaver breeding colony on a *Vitex glabrata* tree in Manas National Park.

63. Screen grab from video footage showing a Black Drongo near the Finn's Weaver colony.

All photos: Jonmani Kalita

64. Drongo nest on a *Premna bengalensis* tree.

On 05 May 2025, three Black Drongos *Dicrurus macrocercus* were observed near the weaver colony. Among them was a pair that nested at a height of four m above ground level on the earlier-abandoned *Premna bengalensis* tree, raising three fledglings, while another drongo frequently perched and roosted on the *Vitex* tree holding the active Finn's Weaver colony. No aggression or nest usurpation was observed. Notably, no avian predators were seen during the monitoring period.

This observation supports earlier suggestions (Ali & Crook 1959; Bhargava 2000; Craig 2020) that Finn's Weavers may benefit from nesting near drongo territories, likely a form of commensalism in which weavers gain protection from the drongo's vigilant and territorial behaviour. While Bhargava (2017) provides extensive observations on the breeding biology of the Finn's Weaver and reports associations with drongos in the nominate subspecies, we found no documentation of such nesting associations in the 'Eastern' Finn's Weavers. Our record may therefore represent the first such confirmation for this subspecies, given the limited breeding documentation.

The Finn's Weaver has a disjunct distribution: the western population, occurs in the Terai grasslands of Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand, whereas the eastern populations occur in Assam (Ali & Ripley 1999; Abdulali 1961; Bhargava 2000; Praveen 2025). The species is threatened by habitat degradation, particularly the loss of seasonally flooded grasslands, and by anthropogenic pressures, including grazing, encroachment, and pet trade. Their relatively short, tubeless nests make them more susceptible to predation (Ali & Crook 1959; Ambedkar 1968), underscoring the potential importance of secure, predator-free nesting environments, such as those near aggressive species, such as the Black Drongo.

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Distasteful butterfly in the diet of the White-capped Redstart *Phoenicurus leucocephalus*

Members of the family Muscicapidae are primarily insectivorous, though some species also feed on spiders, molluscs and sometimes seeds and fruits. The White-capped Redstart *Phoenicurus leucocephalus*, a species belonging to Muscicapidae family, has a wide distributional range, occurring from eastern Uzbekistan, south-western Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan east through Himalayas, to Bangladesh, Myanmar, China, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam (Collar 2020). Its diet usually consists of insects (mayflies, craneflies, beetles, ants), spiders, and molluscs, and occasionally berries and grass seeds (Buckton & Ormerod 2008; Collar 2020).

In nature, birds act as significant predators of butterflies, and several species of birds have been reported to feed on butterflies (Marshall 1909; Orr 2013; Pinheiro & Cintra 2017). Butterflies of the tribe Troidini (family Papilionidae), tribes Acraeini, Danainae, Ithomiinae, and Heliconiinae (Nymphalidae), and some species of genus *Delias* (Pieridae) are generally avoided by birds due to their distastefulness (Rothschild et al. 1970; Bowers 1980; Kunte 2000). Experimental studies show that some birds may eat distasteful butterflies such as the Monarch Butterfly *Danaus Plexippus* (Petersen 1964), and a few wild observations exist, such as *Dicrurus* spp. feeding on *Euploea midamus* (Dannainae) in Java (Marshall 1909), White-breasted Woodswallow *Artamus leucoryn* taking *Tirumala hamata* in Australia (Ford & Ford 1993), and Black-backed Orioles *Icterus abeillei* and Black-headed Grosbeaks *Pheucticus melanocephalus* predating the Monarch Butterfly in Mexico (Fink & Brower 1981). However, such records remain scarce especially from tropical Asia.

During a faunal survey in Raimona National Park, Assam, India on 29 December 2024, at 1310 h, a solitary White-capped Redstart was seen along the edge of Pekua River (26.723°N, 90.052°E) **[65]**. The bird was foraging on the rocks, about 2–3 m from the stream, when it suddenly made a short flight and captured a butterfly. After catching it, the bird tossed the butterfly a few times, dropped it on the ground, then picked it up again and swallowed it whole within two minutes. The whole observation was photographed **[66]** which allowed the identification of the butterfly as a Blue-Spotted Crow *Euploea cf. midamus*, a member of Dannainae, also known as milkweed butterflies (Kehimkar 2016). The known larval host plants of *Euploea* butterflies are primarily the species of *Strophanthus* and *Nerium* which are well-known for their toxicity (Robinson et al. 2023). The adult butterflies obtain the toxic cardenolides through their larval host plants, which are responsible for the distastefulness and aposematic nature.

Photo: Arajush Payra

65. Site in Raimona National Park, Assam, where a White-capped Redstart was documented swallowing a *Euploea cf. midamus*.

All photos: Arajush Payra

66. White-capped Redstart swallowing a *Euploea cf. midamus* in Raimona National Park, Assam, India.

Birds usually consume butterflies by detaching the wings prior to ingesting the body, but in some species, such as Rainbow Bee-eater *Merops ornatus* the entire butterfly is swallowed (Orr 2013). In our observation, the White-capped Redstart also consumed the butterfly whole. While several redstarts like Black Redstart *P. ochruros*, White-winged Redstart *P. erythrogastrus*, Common Redstart *P. phoenicurus*, and Plumbeous Redstart *P. fuliginosus* are known to consume adult Lepidoptera, no previous account of butterflies or moths as diet of the White-capped Redstart exists. This constitutes the first documented record of a Lepidopteran prey item, and notably a distasteful butterfly, in the species' diet. This finding highlights the need for further studies to monitor the prey preferences of White-capped Redstart in Raimona National Park, where several butterfly species are usually seen mudpuddling along the river bed.

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The Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra* in Spiti, Himachal Pradesh, India

The Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra* is a slim, long-distance migrant chat that breeds across Europe and western Asia and winters in sub-Saharan Africa (Urquhart & Bowley 2010; Clement & Rose 2015). Measuring about 12–14 cm, male Whinchat is notable for its rufous-ochre throat and breast during the breeding season (Collar & Garcia 2020). The species typically uses open habitats with scattered shrubs, low herb cover, and exposed perches for foraging and songposts (Collar & Garcia 2020).

CA led a short faunal survey to the high-altitude landscapes of the Spiti Valley, accompanied by DO and AJ. The team explored key habitats around Kibber, Tashigang, Langza, and the Spiti River valley. The Spiti Valley is a Trans-Himalayan landscape and lies in north-eastern Himachal Pradesh. The region has a cold and semi-arid climate, with winter temperatures dropping below -30°C. Due to these harsh conditions, dwarf shrubs dominate the vegetation in Spiti, with *Caragana versicolor* being the principal species (Iyengar et al. 2017). Along the Spiti River and its tributaries, patches of taller scrub, including Sea Buckthorn *Hippophae* sp., Tamarisk *Tamarix* sp., and trees, mainly *Populus* sp., Salix sp., support noticeably higher bird density and diversity.

On 13 June 2025, while surveying one such scrub patch near the Spiti River close to Kaza (32.212°N, 78.074°E; *c.*3,595 m asl), we observed a small bird resembling the Siberian Stonechat *S. maurus* but distinguished by a prominent white supercilium. The head was blackish with brownish streaking and the cheeks were brownish-black having a prominent, short, white moustachial stripe. These were bordered above by a broad whitish supercilium and below by broad white bands, which were meeting at chin in front and extending posteriorly to the nape. The throat, breast, and sides of belly were orange-buff, while the centre of belly and vent were much paler. The back was brownish with dark centres to the feathers, which were forming streaks at some places and spotting at others. The primary projection was long, and the wings were black, having white alula and white patch over dark wing coverts. The outer tail feathers were white. By these features, CA identified it as a male Whinchat in typical breeding plumage **[67, 68]**. The next day it was searched extensively in the same patch, but we couldn't find it again.

67. Male Whinchat showing bold white supercilium, orange-buff throat, breast and sides of belly and paler central belly and vent.

68. Whinchat showing long primary projection and a brownish back with dark centres to the feathers.

Both photos: C. Abhinav

The Whinchat is globally widespread but extremely rare in the Indian subcontinent. Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) listed the species as 'hypothetical' for South Asia. It was added to the Indian subcontinent checklist only after a confirmed sighting from Udawalawe National Park, Sri Lanka on 08 February 2015 (Steiof et al. 2017). Records from India remain very few and are summarised in Table 1.

Most birds breeding north of the Tibetan-Himalayan region follow an indirect, westerly migration route through central and south-western Asia to winter in Africa, in preference to the shorter, but more arduous route through the mountain barrier of the Tibetan-Himalayan massif. However, a significant number of migratory birds do pass through or over these mountain ranges (Delany et al. 2017). In the Southampton University Ladakh Expeditions, long-distance passage migrant passerines made up only a small proportion of the total catch (2.1%), yet they represented the widest species diversity among all categories of migrants, comprising 39% of the species trapped (Delany et al. 2014). This group included several rarities and more

Table 1. Records of Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra* from India

S. No.	Date	Location	Comments	Reference
1	03 April 2021	Hudikeri village, Kodagu District, Karnataka	A male in breeding plumage photographed	Chethan & Prakash (2024)
2	12 December 2021	Near Uppar Reservoir, Dharapuram, Tiruppur District, Tamil Nadu	Photographed	Magesh et al. (2022)
3	04 January 2023	Chushot Marshes, Leh District, Ladakh	Photographed	Stanba (2023)
4	10 May 2023	confluence of Hunza and Nagar rivers, Gilgit-Baltistan	Photographed	Kalmthout (2023)
5	28 November–31 December 2023	Ozarim, North Goa District, Goa	Presumed hybrid of the Whinchat and the Siberian Stonechat *S. maurus*	Topo et al. (2025)
6	15 October 2024	Padvane, Sindhudurg District, Maharashtra	Photographed by multiple observers	Magdum (2024)
7	13 June 2025	Kaza, Lahual and Spiti District, Himachal Pradesh	A male in full breeding plumage photographed	Present record
8	13–14 June 2025	Merak, Pangong Tso, Leh District, Ladakh	Photographed	Gyalpo (2025)
9	09 October 2025	Spituk, Leh District, Ladakh	A Female individual photographed	Sonam (2025)

recently several other rarities have been sighted in Ladakh during migration, like Masked Shrike *Lanius nubicus*, Pallas's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus proregulus*, and Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis* (Delany et al. 2014; Tanveer 2021; Gyalpo et al. 2023; Gyalpo et al. 2024). Several long-distance migrants, which are rare in the India, have also been recorded in the trans-Himalayan landscape of Spiti, like Corn Crake *Crex crex*, Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe Oenanthe*, and Common Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus* (Abhinav et al. 2020, 2021; pers. obs. 2023). The Whinchat is a recent addition to these rare migrants and has also been recorded in Ladakh. Whether such occurrences represent regular but scarce migrants or disoriented vagrants remains unclear (Delany et al. 2017). Whinchat is a long-distance migrant and has the potential to occur far away from its typical migration routes (Steiof et al. 2017). Moreover, the disorientation of migrating birds is thought to increase in mountainous regions (Muheim & Jenni 1999). Based on the above records from India, which occurred in past few years, it seems that a small number of Whinchats pass through the region during migration, which could be the individuals from the eastern-most breeding range of the species.

The Whinchat departs from its wintering grounds between February and mid-April (Collar & Garcia 2020). In Egypt and Middle-east countries, the return migration mainly occurs from late March to early-May and continues till mid-June, although the number decline after early May (Urquhart & Bowley 2010). Arrival on the breeding grounds extends from mid-April to late May (Collar & Garcia 2020). The present individual was seen during mid-June. Although migrants are still expected in the Middle East at that time, the breeding grounds in the Caucasus and north-western Iran lie relatively close to those regions, unlike northern India, which is much farther from the breeding grounds. Thus, our record may represent a slightly delayed migrant. The earlier records of the Whinchat during spring return migration in India, on 03 April and 10 May, are significantly earlier than our observation and the record from Pangong Tso, Ladakh.

For migrating birds that do not typically cover long distances between stopover sites, there must be places in the landscape with sufficient food to allow them to reliably replenish fat reserves (Prins et al. 2017). These few patches of taller scrubs and groves in the cold desert of Spiti provide the essential resources during the long journeys of these migrating birds.

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The Fire-capped Tit *Cephalopyrus flammiceps* from Odisha: An addition to the state's avifauna

The Fire-capped Tit *Cephalopyrus flammiceps* is a small migratory passerine and the sole member of the monotypic genus *Cephalopyrus*. It breeds in the temperate forests along the Himalayas across Pakistan, Nepal, India, Bhutan and around the Myanmar-China border (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). In India, the nominate subspecies breeds between 2,000–3,500 m in the Western Himalayas from Gilgit, Ladakh, Kashmir, Jammu, Himachal, and Uttarakhand (Ali & Ripley 1973; Praveen 2025). During winter, it migrates southwards to the Gangetic plains of Haryana (historical), Uttar Pradesh, Bharatpur (historical), Central Indian highlands of Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and north-eastern Maharashtra (Praveen 2025). The *olivaceus* subspecies, found in the Eastern Himalayas, ranges from eastern Nepal through northern Bengal, Sikkim, Arunachal, and Assam at altitudes between 300 and 2,300 m (Ali & Ripley 1973; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012; Praveen 2025).

On 28 November 2023, at 0700 h, during a birdwatching survey at Soleguda Reserve Forest, Talabhali Beat, Soleguda Section, Sole Range (21.958°N, 84.598°E; 487 m asl), Bonai Forest Division, Odisha, we observed a mixed flock of small passerines, including Small Minivet *Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*, White-bellied Drongo *Dicrurus caerulescens*, and Black-hooded Oriole *Oriolus xanthornus*, foraging on an Indian Ash Tree *Lannea coromandelica* on a hill slope. Photographs of the birds were taken and the observations were uploaded on eBird (Pattnaik & Shukla 2023). Within the mixed flock, there was a small olive-yellow bird that resembled a tit or a warbler and remained visible for 5–6 minutes before disappearing into thick foliage. The species was identified as a female Fire-capped Tit **[69]** from the photographs, showing narrow conical, pointed bill, olive-yellow plumage, and pale wingbars (Burton 1836). Searches through eBird, GBIF, and iNaturalist, along with a literature review confirmed this as the first record of the species from Odisha. The nearest observations from the present location include three records from Chhattisgarh—Raipur (Parmar 2022), Bilaspur (Tripathi 2022), and Kangar Valley National Park, Bastar (Bharos et al. 2019) and one from Sushunia, Bankura, West Bengal (Mukherjee et al. 2024).

Photo: Digvijaya Pattnaik

69. A female Fire-capped Tit photographed from Bonai Forest Division, Odisha on 28 November 2023.

This observation extends the species' migration range further east and suggests that forests of Odisha may serve as potential wintering or stopover habitat for individuals migrating southward. However, much of the Bonai Forest Division lies within a mining-influenced landscape, though the Sole Range itself is not affected. Forest fires, however, remain a recurrent threat to wintering habitat. Prompt enforcement and fire-control efforts by the local forest department help mitigate these risks.

This record represents the first evidence-based occurrence of Fire-capped Tit in Odisha. Further systematic surveys would help clarify the species' status and movement patterns in the state.

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The Indian Grey Hornbill *Ocyceros birostris* from Samtse, Bhutan: An addition to the country's avifauna

The Indian Grey Hornbill *Ocyceros birostris* is a small silver-grey hornbill that inhabits open woodlands and deciduous forests (Balasubramanian 2020). It primarily feeds on fruits from *Ficus* sp., along with other fruits like *Pithecelobium dulce, Manilkara hexandra, Syzygium cumini, Zizyphus mauritiana,* and *Thevetia nerifolia* (Balasubramanian 2020). The species plays a crucial role in seed dispersal, significantly enhancing germination in dry-deciduous forests (Charde et al., 2011). Its range includes most of the Indian subcontinent, excluding north-eastern India and higher Himalayan regions (BirdLife International 2020).

On the morning of 04 March 2025, KG observed and photographed **[70]** an Indian Grey Hornbill, south of the Samtse College of Education at an elevation of *c.*391 m asl (26.890°N, 89.100°E), perched on a *Cassia leavigata* tree. The photographs were reviewed and confirmed by ornithologist, Sherub, and the following field marks were noted: medium size, greyish-brown upper parts, a faint pale supercilium, dark ear coverts, dark brown flight feathers with whitish tips, a tail with a white tip, and a dark subterminal band. This marks the second confirmed observation of the species in Bhutan, following the first sighting **[71]** on 13 April 2023 by CT near Mouthangchhu (26.860°N, 90.490°E) in Gelephu under Sarpang district, Bhutan (eBird 2023). This sighting in Bhutan, near the border with India, is not unexpected, as the species occurs regularly on the Indian side, particularly in the Jaldapara National Park and Buxa Tiger Reserve landscapes (eBird 2026). With these records, the total number of hornbill species documented in Bhutan rises to five: Great Hornbill *Buceros bicornis*, Rufous-necked Hornbill *Aceros nipalensis*, Oriental Pied Hornbill *Anthracoceros albirostris*, Wreathed Hornbill *Rhyticeros undulatus*, and Indian Grey Hornbill.

The Divisional Forest Office, Samtse, has been actively monitoring this species to better understand its population status and habitat use patterns, as it is regularly observed. During the observation period, the individual displayed typical behavioral traits such as foraging and roosting. It appeared to be assessing potential roosting locations, likely within a cavity of a nearby mature *Bombax ceiba* tree. This cavity is a shared and competitive resource, frequently used by other cavity-nesting birds, including owlets, mynas, and parakeets, a pattern also documented by Santhoshkumar & Balasubramanian (2010).

The subtropical broadleaf forests of Samtse, characterized by a mosaic of natural forest, agricultural land, and riverine habitats, offer suitable conditions for the Indian Grey Hornbill. However, these habitats are increasingly affected by anthropogenic pressures, highlighting their growing conservation importance. The consistent presence of this individual in the Samtse area suggests that the landscape may function as a significant foraging site or serve as a seasonal habitat for the species. The occurrence of the Indian Grey Hornbill in Bhutan represents either a range extension or an undocumented resident population within the country's subtropical forest zone. This record contributes to the national avifaunal checklist, underscores the need for systematic biodiversity assessments in lowland districts, and highlights the ecological connectivity between Bhutanese subtropical forests and adjoining Indian lowland habitats.

Photo: Kuenley Gyentshen

70. Indian Grey Hornbill from Samtse, Bhutan in March 2025.

Photo: Chubzang Tangbi

71. Indian Grey Hornbill from Gelephu, Bhutan in April 2023.

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A Western Hooded Pitta *Pitta sordida* from Gurugram, Haryana

On 23 June 2025, JO observed a greenish, stub-tailed bird sitting motionless on her first-floor balcony at Malibu Towne, Sector 47, Gurugram, Haryana (28.465°N, 77.048°E). The bird allowed close approach and appeared fatigued. Malibu Towne is a heavily wooded residential township in Gurugram with low-rise buildings and tree-lined avenues, dominated by *Alstonia scholaris*, *Azadirachta indica*, *Albizia lebbeck*, *Delonix regia*, *Bombax ceiba*, *Cassia fistula*, and several *Ficus* species.

The bird was brought inside the house and quickly put in a safe cardboard box. JO clicked a few pictures of the bird and circulated them on colony's nature group, where it was identified as an adult Western Hooded Pitta *Pitta sordida,* based on its

chestnut crown, black head, green upperparts with turquoise wing patches, and a distinct red vent. By evening, the bird showed signs of improvement and was taking flight inside the house. It was therefore released the following morning at Bhondsi Nature Reserve **[72]**, located in the foothills of the Aravali Range, a known habitat of the closely related Indian Pitta *P. brachyura*.

Photo: Pankaj Gupta

72. Western Hooded Pitta photographed upon release at Bhondsi Nature Reserve, Haryana on 24 June 2025.

Upon release at around 0550 h, the bird took a quick flight and was subsequently observed foraging on the ground and moving between citrus bushes and bamboo clumps over the next two days. After two days, the bird was no longer sighted.

The Western Hooded Pitta is a summer visitor to the Himalayan foothills and north-eastern Bangladesh, Myanmar, southern China, northern Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and northern and central Thailand. Further east, it is resident in Java, Sumatra, and throughout much of Borneo, the Philippines, and Sangihe off northern Sulawesi, where the species reaches its easternmost limits (Kirwan & Erritzoe 2025). In India, the species breeds in western Himachal, Haryana, Uttarakhand, and northern Uttar Pradesh. During non-breeding season, it occurs in northern Bihar, northern Bengal, Sikkim, Assam, all north-eastern hill states, while being straggler to Narcondam Islands (Praveen 2025). The nearest previous records to the present sighting are from Kalesar National Park, within Haryana (Kalsi et al. 2017; Sharma 2018) and Himachal Pradesh (Jones 1943). This is the first confirmed record for the National Capital Region in Gurugram, Haryana.

Although this record likely represents a case of vagrancy far beyond the species' usual range, we recommend monitoring of the Western Hooded Pitta to understand any changes in seasonal migration patterns and any possible range expansion.

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A Black-winged Cuckooshrike *Lalage melaschistos* from the Kashmir Valley, Jammu & Kashmir, India

On 29 April 2025, during an afternoon bird survey near Sangrama, Baramulla District (34.238°N, 74.434°E, *c.*1,640 m asl), Jammu & Kashmir, India, I observed two individuals of Black-winged Cuckooshrike *Lalage melaschistos*, at 1600 h. The birds were emerging from the flowering canopy of Black Locust *Robinia pseudoacacia* tree. Despite overcast skies and low-light conditions, I managed to obtain several photographs. The birds were observed moving between Apple *Malus domestica* and Black Locust tree canopies. At first, they were mistaken for juvenile cuckoos; however, upon closer observation, features such as uniform grey plumage, contrasting black wings, black bill, and a white-tipped tail were noted, suggesting their identity as Black-winged Cuckooshrike **[73, 74]**. For verification, I shared the images with Waseem Bhat, who confirmed their identification as Black-winged Cuckooshrikes.

A review of available literature and online databases revealed no prior records of this species from the Kashmir Valley. This was further confirmed by Muzaffar A. Kichloo, regional eBird editor and lead author of the checklist of birds of Jammu & Kashmir

73. Black-winged Cuckooshrike showing uniform grey plumage with contrasting black wings.

Both photos: Ab. Qayoom Sofi

74. Black-winged Cuckooshrike showing black bill and white-tipped tail.

(Muzaffar A. Kichloo, pers. comm. May 2025).

In India the species breeds in Jammu, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, northern Bengal, Sikkim, and all north-eastern hill states. Non-breeding range extends to adjacent plains and Central Indian highlands, south-western Bengal, Chota Nagpur plateau of Jharkhand, northern Odisha, Andhra, and Chhattisgarh (Praveen 2025). The nearest record of this bird from the current location is from Mendhar, Poonch District (Khan 2021, 2024). This observation represents a significant north-westward extension of its known range in India.

I thank Muzaffar A. Kichloo for confirming this as the first regional record and helping with the manuscript, and to Waseem Bhat for assistance with identification.

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The Indian Blue Robin *Larvivora brunnea* as a passage migrant in Chhattisgarh, India

The Indian Blue Robin *Larvivora brunnea* breeds from May to September across northeastern Afghanistan, the Safed Koh range, and the Himalayas from northern Pakistan to Bhutan, extending into southern and central China (Collar 2020). In India, it breeds along the Himalaya from Kashmir, Jammu, Himachal, Uttarakhand, northern Bengal, Sikkim, Arunachal, and Nagaland (Praveen 2025). It winters in hilly areas from 600–2,100 m, mainly in the Western Ghats and Sri Lanka, as well as in Meghalaya, Cachar, Manipur, and Mizoram (Ali & Ripley 1987; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012; Praveen 2025). Passage migrant records are scattered across peninsular India, including Gujarat, Central India, north-eastern Ghats, West Bengal, and northern plains (Praveen 2025).

On 21 April 2021, HG photographed an Indian Blue Robin foraging in the undergrowth of a small wooded patch at Mowa (21.272°N, 81.656°E), Raipur, Chhattisgarh. On 30 April 2025, during a birdwatching session near Dhaara Dam (21.277°N, 80.833°E) in Rajnandgaon, Chhattisgarh, PT was initially attracted by the call of a White-rumped Shama *Copsychus malabaricus.* While filming the Shama, an unfamiliar bird with striking blue upperparts, a prominent white supercilium, black cheeks, chestnut-colored throat and breast, and white undertail coverts was noticed nearby. It was identified as a male Indian Blue Robin based on these characteristics **[75]**. The individual was observed near a small stream flowing from a leakage point of the dam, actively foraging along the muddy edges and occasionally perching on nearby saplings.

On 03 May 2025, SDB sighted and photographed the species at Sector-03 (21.199°N, 81.373°E), Bhilai, Chhattisgarh, an area comprising old plantations established by the Bhilai Steel Plant (BSP) and a perennial stream. The bird later flew into dense vegetation, limiting further observations. Despite visiting the site on the next two consecutive days, the bird was not spotted again. The area is a well-known birding hotspot regularly visited by local birders.

Photo: Pratik Thakur

75. Indian Blue Robin from Dhaara Dam, Rajnandgaon, Chhatisgarh on 30 April 2025.

In Chhattisgarh, this bird has been previously reported from a garden in Raipur on 13 April 1991 (Bharos 1992), and from Narayanpur on 07 October 2005 (19.715°N, 81.225°E) (Bharos et al. 2019). All documented records of the Indian Blue Robin from Chhattisgarh coincide with the spring and autumn migratory periods, indicating that the species most likely occurs as a passage migrant in the state.

We sincerely thank Dr. Anurag Vishwakarma and the Chhattisgarh Forest Department for their support and assistance during the study.

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The Critically Endangered Indian Vulture *Gyps indicus* in Rajgir Wildlife Sanctuary, Bihar, India

The Indian subcontinent hosts nine vulture species, of which seven are resident breeders, including the Indian Vulture *Gyps indicus*. The Indian Vulture is listed as Critically Endangered (BirdLife International 2021) due to a substantial decline of over 90% across India since the 1990s, driven by a range of threats, including habitat destruction, food scarcity, and widespread diclofenac contamination (Oaks et al. 2004; Cuthbert et al. 2011). Historically, the Indian Vulture was found extensively across India,

Pakistan, and Nepal, favoring rocky cliffs, open arid environments, and sparsely wooded areas for scavenging and roosting.

On 15 February 2025, a group of bird enthusiasts and wildlife biologists recorded three adult Indian Vultures at Vaibhargiri Hill, within the Rajgir Wildlife Sanctuary, Bihar, during a field survey to assess the area's avian diversity **[76]**. The vultures were observed flying at a considerable altitude, soaring on thermal currents in their characteristic gliding manner. A subsequent sighting of a flock of 14 Indian Vultures in flight was also documented by the same team on 13 March 2025, within the nearby Rajgir Zoo area; of these, approximately eight were adults, while six appeared to be immature**.** This vulture is mainly pale, with light wing-coverts, a yellow bill, and a blackish neck covered in whitish down. Juveniles appear darker but have a pale, fully downy neck; they are paler than White-rumped Vulture *G. bengalensis* and smaller and lighter than Slender-billed Vulture *G. tenuirostris*.

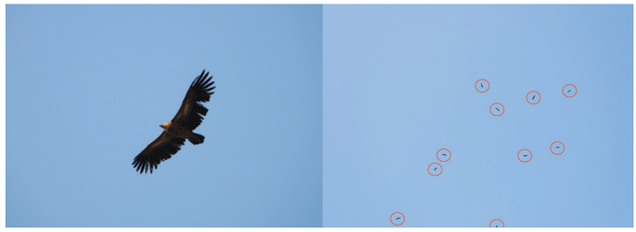

Photo: Ramsundar

76. An Indian Vulture in flight at Vaibhargiri Hill & a large flock at Rajgir Zoo area.

Although vulture populations have been documented in parts of Bihar, such as Bhagalpur, Kaimur Wildlife Sanctuary, and Valmiki Tiger Reserve, where the White-rumped Vulture and Red-headed Vulture *Sarcogyps calvus* are known to occur (Mall et al. 2022), there are no previous records of the Indian Vulture from Rajgir Wildlife Sanctuary. The present observation, therefore, represents the first confirmed sighting of this species within the sanctuary. Regionally, this species is known from neighbouring Nepal (Subedi & DeCandido 2013) and West Bengal (Ranade & Prakash 2021), indicating that the Rajgir population may form part of a wider distribution range extending across eastern India and adjoining areas. We are not aware of any other recent records of Indian Vulture from Bihar.

This is the first confirmed record of the Indian Vulture in Rajgir Wildlife Sanctuary and its adjoining areas, including the Rajgir Zoo Safari, Bihar (25.004°N, 85.402°E) (Fig 1), together encompassing 35.84 sq km. The area is characterized by a mosaic of mixed deciduous forest, dry *Sal* Forest, open scrubland, mixed bamboo forest, and rocky outcrops, together providing ideal habitat for vultures. The Rajgir Hills, situated within the southern Gangetic Plain, represent the only forested tract in the Nalanda district, providing crucial refuge for a diverse assemblage of flora and fauna. This record of the Indian Vulture underscores the area's suitability as a habitat for roosting, foraging, and seasonal congregation. The observation significantly extends the known range of the species in Bihar, providing crucial confirmation of its presence. It also highlights

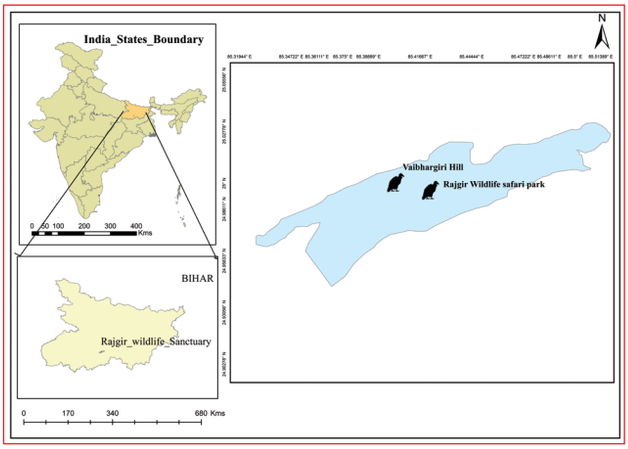

Fig 1. Map of Rajgir Wildlife Sanctuary showing the Indian Vultures observation sites.

the conservation value of Rajgir Wildlife Sanctuary and adjacent areas, including Rajgir Zoo Safari, as emerging strongholds for vulture populations in the region.

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In Memoriam

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