

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

The Indian Grey Hornbill *Ocyrceros 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



Photo: Kuenley Gyeltschen

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



Photo: Chubzang Tangbi

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

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.

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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 lebbek*, *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.



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

Both photos: Ab Qayoom Sofi