does not explain why the crown and nape are unnaturally dark. Taken together, the tail pattern, primary projection and plumage structure are inconsistent with Pied Wheatear.

In summary, the bird does not perfectly fit any species, but it would be much less unusual as a Variable Wheatear than anything else, particularly considering the location. And numerically, an aberrant Variable would be far more likely in India than any Cyprus Wheatear, let alone one showing such abnormalities. However, without DNA or in-hand identification, it is not possible to be certain of the identification of this bird. Given the absence of diagnostic features supporting Cyprus Wheatear and the presence of several inconsistencies, this species can be reasonably excluded. Therefore, it would be prudent not to add Cyprus Wheatear to the Indian avifauna based on this record. However, due to the extra attention it generated, it is encouraging to note that several others have been lucky enough to see and photograph this atypical bird.

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The Sind Woodpecker *Dendrocopos assimilis* from Bhimber, Jammu & Kashmir: An addition to the state avifauna

The Sind Woodpecker *Dendrocopos assimilis* occur primarily in arid and semi-arid landscapes of the northwestern Indian Subcontinent (Ali & Ripley 1987; Grimmett et al. 2008, 2011). It has also been recorded from southern Iran, in Baluchestan and Hormozgan, where it may overlap and hybridize with the Syrian Woodpecker *D. syriacus* (Khaleghizadeh et al. 2017). In India, however, its distribution is localized and fragmented, with present-day records largely confined to areas immediately east of the Pakistan-India border in Rajasthan with historical records of specimens from Punjab (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012; Pande et al. 2015). Given the ecological continuity of dry scrub and agro-woodland habitats across the Pakistan-India border in this region, the occurrence of the species in adjacent areas of Jammu & Kashmir is biogeographically plausible and consistent with its known habitat preferences, providing important context for the present record. There are no records however till date from Jammu & Kashmir (Mirza 2012; Kichloo et al. 2024). We present the first record of Sind Woodpecker from Jammu & Kashmir.

Bhimber is located at the south-western part of Jammu & Kashmir with elevations ranging from 350–1,350 m asl (Jabeen & Malik 2014). The region features a mosaic of habitats, including dry plains, shrubs, and cultivated agricultural lands interspersed with patches of forest and riverine vegetation. Dominated trees in forested patches include *Butea monosperma*, *Dalbergia sissoo*, *Vachellia nilotica*, and *Ziziphus mauritiana* (Goursi et al. 2017), which should provide potential foraging and nesting sites for Sind Woodpecker. These fall in the parts of Jammu and Kashmir administered by Pakistan.

During systematic bird surveys conducted by us in Barnala Tehsil between 27 March to 14 April 2024, we encountered the Sind Woodpecker once at Kundpur Village (32.898°N, 74.227°E; 388 m). On 14 April 2024, at 1621 h, a single individual flew from a *Vachellia* tree to a nearby *Ziziphus* tree, after which it was carefully observed while actively foraging on tree trunks and branches. The bird was actively foraging on the trunks of *Vachellia sp.* and *Z. mauritiana*, moving between trees over a period of approximately one hour **[116]**. It was predominantly black and white, with large white patches on the shoulders and scapulars and unmarked or pale underparts. A distinct black malar stripe extended posteriorly to merge with the black patch on the neck sides. It was a female based on the absence of a crimson crown on the head. During a subsequent visit to the same locality, a male Sind Woodpecker was recorded on 22 February 2026 at 1205 h. It was observed perched and foraging on a *Vachellia* tree within the same habitat. The bird was identified as a male based on the presence of a distinct crimson crown **[117]**.

116. A female Sind Woodpecker *Dendrocopos assimilis* perched on the bark of a *Ziziphus* tree showing black crown and large white patches on shoulders and scapulars.

117. A male Sind Woodpecker *Dendrocopos assimilis* perched on a *Vachellia* tree.

Both photos: Touseef Ahmed

The surrounding habitat comprised agricultural land near human settlement, with low hills dominated by a mixed stand

of *V. modesta*, *Z. mauritiana*, and *V. nilotica* **[118]**, providing potential foraging and nesting substrates for Sind Woodpecker. These details would potentially help other birders to search for this species elsewhere in this landscape.

Photo: Touseef Ahmed

118. Habitat of the locality showing dominant Vachellia sp. And Ziziphus mauritiana at Kundpur Village.

These observations, representing both male and female individuals, constitutes the first confirmed record of Sind Woodpecker from Jammu & Kashmir. This is not unexpected as there are several records in Punjab, Pakistan, which are *c.*50 km west of our site (eBird 2026). Nearest records of Sind Woodpecker from India are of specimens collected from Arniwala and Fazilka, both in Fazilka (formerly part of Firozpur) district, Punjab, India (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012; Praveen 2024). Our site is *c.*240km north of these sites in India, indicating a notable gap in formally documented records in this region. Our finding emphasizes the need for focused bird surveys in low elevation and human-modified landscapes of the district to improve knowledge of local avifaunal diversity and broad distribution patterns.

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The Critically Endangered Great Indian Bustard *Ardeotis nigriceps* at Tulshi Reservoir, Kolhapur District, Maharashtra, India

The Great Indian Bustard *Ardeotis nigriceps* (GIBU, hereinafter) is one of the most threatened bird species globally and is currently classified as Critically Endangered by the IUCN due to its extremely small and rapidly declining population (BirdLife International 2018). Once widely distributed across the grasslands and semi-arid regions of the Indian subcontinent, the species has suffered severe range contraction over the past century, primarily as a result of habitat loss, agricultural intensification, infrastructure development, and increased human disturbance (Dutta et al. 2011). This note describes the sighting of a GIBU from Tulshi Reservoir (Fig. 1) of Kolhapur District of Maharashtra, from the northern Western Ghats landscape, and outside its known stronghold in the state of Maharashtra.

An adult GIBU was seen for the first time at Tulshi Reservoir, Kolhapur District, Maharashtra, India on 12 January 2025, at 1015 h, near the reservoir margins at Kumbharwadi (16.526°N, 74.010°E) **[119]**. This individual, a female, was foraging in an open landscape adjoining the reservoir. Identification was straightforward as no other species has such a large body, long legs, erect posture, brownish upperparts, contrasting black crown, and pale neck and underparts. The bustard was observed for approximately a minute. During this period, it moved slowly across ground, foraging intermittently. It remained vigilant and avoided us despite being far, eventually walking away and disappearing from our view. It later took to wing and flew towards west. No additional individuals were observed in the vicinity despite a thorough search. We kept visiting the site since then but have not come across any GIBU.

Tulshi Reservoir, created Tulshi earthen dam, has an area of 135 ha, and was built mainly for irrigation. Most of its catchment area lies in the adjoining Western Ghats. Around the water-spread area, the landscape consisted predominantly of open grassland,

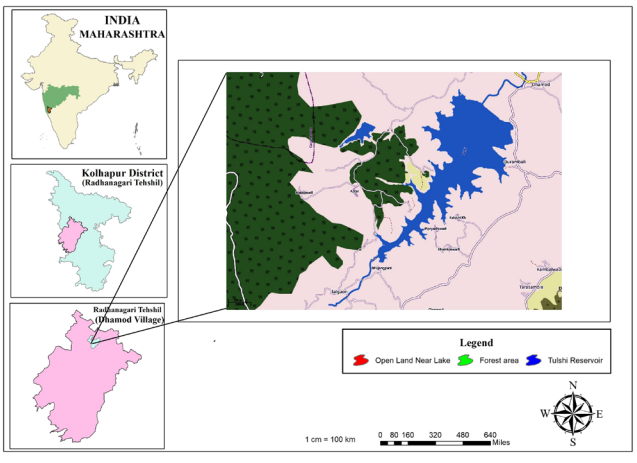

Fig. 1. Tulshi reservoir, Kolhapur district, Maharashtra, India