



93. Red-whiskered Bulbul feeding the Common Tailorbird nestlings, while the presumed male Common Tailorbird (perched below) waits with food in its bill.



Both photos: Nigin Babu

94. Red-whiskered Bulbul feeding the Common Tailorbird nestlings, while the presumed male Common Tailorbird (perched below) waits with food in its bill.

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## The White-bellied Minivet *Pericrocotus erythropygus* from Ferozepur District, Punjab, India and its status in the state

The White-bellied Minivet *Pericrocotus erythropygus* is an Indian breeding endemic that has a widespread distribution but is very local and uncommon throughout its range (Grimmett et al. 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012; Suryawanshi 2020). Though somewhat nomadic post-breeding, it is mainly found in the north and central region; inhabiting grassy deciduous and thorn forest, rocky scrub-covered slopes, and dry open scrub (Grimmett et al. 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). Here, we report a sighting of the White-bellied Minivet from Ferozepur district, Punjab and discuss its status in the state.

Biṛ Chak Sarkar is a small (438 ha) notified reserve forest (Punjab Forest Department 2025) in Dona Jaimalwala (30.891°N, 74.410°E; c.192 m asl), Mamdot Block, Ferozepur District, Punjab, India. This forest is located right along the Indo-Pakistan International Border. This forest is a patch of tropical dry deciduous and thorn forest with some scattered trees.

On 24 January 2020, MA and TS were out for birding in the said forest on a foggy winter morning. At 0835 h, MA saw and photographed a small bird which he thought could be a White Wagtail *Motacilla alba* and didn't pay much attention. At 0955 h, they noticed a similar bird with pied plumage on the top of a small bushy tree. MA thought that wagtails seldom perch on trees in that manner, so it could be something different. TS thought that it could be a Pied Bushchat *Saxicola caprata*. Looking carefully, they noticed more birds and counted c. 15 of them, virtually hidden in lower branches of the same tree. A few of them kept flying to the other nearby vegetation to catch insects, but kept returning back. Within 5–7 minutes, all of them flew away and settled elsewhere. Nevertheless, they had already clicked some photographs and decided not to pursue the birds further. A couple of Small Minivets *P. cinnamomeus* were also spotted a few meters away from the place where this flock of birds with pied plumage was basking in the sun on that cold morning.

MA shared photos with GPS to discuss the identity. Structurally, the bird was a minivet, and from the photographs [95, 96], it was identified as the White-bellied Minivet based on the white wing-slash, belly, vent and tail-sides as well as lack of any yellow or cinnamon plumage anywhere on its underparts. The individual in the photographs could be identified as a female from brownish-grey upperparts with whitish forehead and brow, with sullied brownish across breast (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012).



95. A female White-bellied Minivet showing brownish-grey upperparts and white wing slash.

Photo: Manish Ahuja

Table 1. Previous reports of White-bellied Minivet from Punjab

Location	Date	Reference	Remarks
Chabbewal, Hoshiarpur District	31 January 1983	Dhindsa et al. (1991)	A flock is mentioned but no other details provided. Perhaps, confused with race <i>pallidus</i> of the Small Minivet. Hence, not considered reliable.
Japanese Garden, P.A.U. Campus, Ludhiana	NA	Dhindsa et al. (1991)	No details provided. Perhaps, confused with race <i>pallidus</i> of the Small Minivet. Hence, not considered reliable.
Santokhgarh, Rupnagar District	NA	Kumar et al. (2006)	Reported as a resident with no details of sightings. Diagnostic details reproduced from standard references. Hence, not considered reliable.
Keshopur Chhambh Community Reserve, Gurdaspur District	July 2018 to May 2019	Jangral (2020)	Presence of the species in their study area continuously for eleven months is highly unlikely based on the present understanding of the species' nomadic habits.
Keshopur Chhambh Community Reserve, Gurdaspur District	July 2019 to June 2020	Jangral & Vashishat (2023)	Included in a list but no details or evidence provided. Checked with the corresponding author, but there is no photograph of the bird (Nisha Vashishat in message dated 09 April 2026).



Photo: Tushant Sachdeva

96. A female White-bellied Minivet showing white breast, sullied brownish; pure white belly and vent.

The site was not visited again as it is in a remote area right on the sensitive international border for which permission is required from the authorities. On 26 January 2025, however, a specific visit was made by MA to search for White-bellied Minivets, but he could not find any.

As per Mukherjee (1995), the White-bellied Minivet occupies the greater parts of the Indian Peninsula including the drier parts of Punjab, Rajasthan, Kachchh, Saurashtra, and northern Gujarat. However, Ali & Ripley (1996) don't mention Punjab but mention that this species is locally distributed in peninsular India southeast of a line from Ambala (Haryana), Jodhpur (Rajasthan), and Kachchh (Gujarat), to further south and east. Grimmett et al. (2011) indicate the status of this species as uncertain with two question marks in northern Punjab in the distribution map. Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) include its range as from "Indian Punjab (Hisar) and Gujarat to Bihar, south to Andhra and Tamil Nadu, with scattered records from S Pakistan and Haryana to W Bengal and south to Kerala." However, the Punjab State from India is mentioned erroneously, as Hisar is a town in Haryana and not in the present-day Punjab, though historically it was, pre-1966. Suryawanshi (2020) describes the northern distribution as "south of Ambala in Punjab"; but it may be noted that Ambala is also in Haryana and not in Punjab.

We also checked other ornithological literature and unpublished sources like social media and citizen science platforms. We found no previous photographic evidence of this species from Punjab but there are a few published reports. However, none of them had sufficient evidence to corroborate

their records, particularly considering this being the edge of the range for such an uncommon and local species (Table 1).

It can be seen that none of the previous reports of White-bellied Minivet is reliable. There is a strong possibility of confusion with race *pallidus* of Small Minivet known from Punjab which has white underparts (Ali & Ripley 1996). Thus, it can be concluded that the presence of White-bellied Minivet in the present-day Punjab has not been reliably established, prior to our present sighting. However, there are still pockets of suitable habitat, especially in southern districts of Punjab, surviving amid intensive agriculture and increasing pressure on land due to development. Therefore, the birdwatchers from Punjab or those visiting from other places, should try to look for this species especially during the winter.

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