A Mandarin Duck *Aix galericulata* in western Assam

On 18 December 2024, (26.759°N, 91.232°E) at approximately 1545 h, we were scanning for Long-billed Plovers *Charadrius placidus* at Pota Dwilam, a scenic riverine picnic spot **[87]** on the outskirts of Manas National Park and Tiger Reserve in Assam, when a small duck flew by against the sunlight. It exhibited a maroon-coloured head and a white eye patch. Although initially unidentifiable due to backlighting, the bird landed *c.*500 m away in a pond. We approached carefully to minimize disturbance, and at the pond we spotted a mixed flock comprising Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca*, Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*, and notably, a Mandarin Duck *Aix galericulata*, a species extremely rare in this region **[88]**.

87. Habitat at Pota Dwilam, Manas National Park.

Both photos: Tomal Gogoi

88. Mandarin Duck from Pota Dwilam, Manas National Park.

The Mandarin Duck is native to eastern Asia and is admired for its ornate plumage and rarity outside its core range. Its presence in the Indian subcontinent, where most sightings are from north-eastern India and Bhutan, is rare and is usually attributed to winter vagrancy. In Assam, the earliest records date to Baker (1902) from the Dibru and Subansiri rivers, and the species was recorded again 112 years later in the Baksa district, near Manas National Park, in February 2014 (Das et al. 2015). Modern records from the state are from Sadiya and Maguri-Motapung Beel (Ahmed & Rajpoot 2021; eBird 2025). Sightings have also occurred in neighbouring Manipur (Gimson 1934; Choudhury 2009; Kasambe & Singh 2014), Arunachal Pradesh, and Tripura (Ahmed & Rajpoot 2021; eBird 2025). The present sighting from Pota Dwilam represents the second confirmed record of Mandarin Duck from western Assam, adding to the growing evidence that the Brahmaputra valley and adjoining Himalayan foothills form part of the species' occasional wintering range.

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Interspecific feeding: Red-whiskered Bulbul *Pycnonotus jocosus* feeding Common Tailorbird *Orthotomus sutorius* nestlings

On 13 January 2024, I observed a Red-whiskered Bulbul *Pycnonotus jocosus* feeding nestlings of Common Tailorbird *Orthotomus sutorius* in the nest of the latter species at my home in Kozhikode, Kerala, India (11.256°N, 75.806°E). The nest was built on an indoor ornamental plant, *Dracaena surculosa*. The Common Tailorbirds constructed the nest **[89, 90]** in December 2023 and subsequently laid eggs. These hatched successfully, and the nest contained four nestlings. On 03 January 2024, a pair of Red-whiskered Bulbuls began constructing a nest **[91, 92]** at a distance of 39 cm below the nest of the Common Tailorbird. This was measured after both nests were vacated. Initially, the tailorbirds responded aggressively to the bulbuls' presence, giving alarm calls and frequently chasing them away.

Keeping in mind the guidelines laid out for studying and observing nesting birds in Barve et al. (2020), I noted that by 04 January 2024, the nest construction of Red-whiskered Bulbul was complete. That evening, I observed the presumed male Common Tailorbird aggressively attack one of the nesting bulbuls near its nest, forcing the bulbuls to temporarily leave the site. The sex of this Common Tailorbird individual was inferred by its nocturnal roosting behaviour; while the female remained in the nest for roosting and incubation, this individual roosted outside the nest during the night. This behaviour is consistent with males in this species. In addition to display of aggressive territorial behaviour, this individual also showed a partly missing tail with only a single long feather remaining and was, thus, easily recognized and distinguished physically. Despite this incident, the bulbuls continued to frequent the area. Based on my observations of afternoon nest visits, I noted that two eggs were laid in the bulbul's nest on 07 and 09 January 2024, respectively. Interestingly, once the bulbul commenced incubation, the tailorbirds ceased their aggressive responses.

89. Close-up of the nest of Common Tailorbird.

90. Nests of Common Tailorbird (top) and Red-whiskered Bulbul (bottom) in close proximity.

All photos: Nigin Babu

91. Nests of Common Tailorbird (top, encircled) and Red-whiskered Bulbul (bottom).

92. Red-whiskered Bulbul sitting on its nest.

On 08 January 2024, I observed a Red-whiskered Bulbul enter the tailorbird's nest. Concerned that it might harm the nestlings, I instinctively intervened to divert its attention. Though in hindsight, I realised I should have refrained from doing so, and let nature take its own course. However, my actions did not seem to deter the bulbul from doing what it may have initially intended to do; and shortly afterwards, I observed the bulbul return with a medium-sized black spider in its beak, and attempted to feed it to the tailorbird nestlings. I noted one tailorbird nestling struggling to swallow a relatively large prey item brought by the bulbul, but it managed to ingest it eventually. This was the first instance of interspecific feeding I witnessed during my observations of the nesting of the two species. I continued observing the nests from inside my room through a transparent glass window at a distance of 2.65 m from the site, ensuring minimal disturbance as recommended in various works (Götmark 1992; Mayer-Gross et al. 1997; Barve et al. 2020). I noticed that the presumed male Common Tailorbird began tolerating my occasional presence, possibly interpreting it as a deterrent to predators or intruders like the bulbul (Ibáñez-Álamo et al. 2012). The Red-whiskered Bulbul continued to feed the tailorbird nestlings with small insects, though much less frequently than the parent birds. The feeding behaviour continued until 10 January 2024, when the last nestling fledged. I also noted that the bulbul consumed faecal sacs after feeding the tailorbird nestlings, a behaviour typical of avian parental care.

The bulbul's eggs disappeared on 11 January 2024, likely due to predation. Interestingly, I observed that the tailorbirds sometimes delayed feeding their nestlings until after the bulbul had finished its turn **[93, 94]**, suggesting a temporary adaptation to the unexpected helper at nest. The parent tailorbirds would also encourage the nestlings to fledge through feeding manoeuvres, a behaviour the parents usually exhibited by holding food and flying to a nearby perch encouraging the young to follow them. However, the bulbuls were not observed doing this and were only observed directly feeding the nestlings at nest.

There appear to be no documented cases of interspecific feeding between Red-whiskered Bulbul and Common Tailorbird (Harmáčková 2021); however, a recent video on YouTube documents a Common Tailorbird feeding nestlings of Red-whiskered Bulbul at the latter's nest from Kerala, India (Life Unscripted by Mahesh 2025). Interspecific feeding in birds is rare behaviour, with often proximate and/or speculative reasoning (Shy 1982). The proximate reasons for this case may likely be, first, the proximity of the two nests, and second, predation of eggs of one of the involved species.

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 erythropygius* from Ferozepur District, Punjab, India and its status in the state

The White-bellied Minivet *Pericrocotus erythropygius* 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).

Photo: Manish Ahuja

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