

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.



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.

References

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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.