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The Caspian Plover *Anarhynchus asiaticus* from Bilaspur: An addition to the avifauna of Chhattisgarh, India

The Caspian Plover *Anarhynchus asiaticus* breeds across Central Asia, including regions around the Caspian Sea, and spends its non-breeding period primarily in eastern and southern Africa, with additional records from Mauritania, Mali, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Cameroon, Gabon, and Congo in West Africa, as well as islands of the western Indian Ocean including Madagascar, Mauritius, Réunion, Rodrigues, Seychelles, and Comoros (Sinclair & Langrand 2004; Message & Taylor 2024). Historically, the Caspian Plover has been regarded as a vagrant in the Indian Subcontinent (Ali & Ripley 1980; Grimmett et al. 1998; Kazmierczak 2000; Rasmussen & Anderton 2005). However, subsequent assessments suggest that it may occur more regularly than previously assumed, with small numbers likely wintering in the region (Sangha et al. 2010). In India, it has been recorded sporadically from Rajasthan (Sangha et al. 2010), Delhi (Vyas 1996), Gujarat (Robson 2007; Sørensen & Tiwari 2009), Goa (Lainer 2004), Maharashtra (Prasad 2006), Puducherry (Balachandran 1994), Tamil Nadu (Kazmierczak et al. 1993; Robson 1996), Haryana, and Kerala (Sangha 2021).

On 04 September 2025, SPP and KP observed a single Caspian Plover during a bird walk at Mohanbhata (22.246°N, 82.020°E) in Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh. The site is a typical *bhata* habitat—open grassland exposed to cattle grazing, interspersed with small seasonal ponds. The presence of muddy flats and shallow water provides favorable conditions for waterbirds and serves an important stopover site for migratory waders during the monsoon. Several plovers including Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva*, Little Ringed Plover *Thinornis dubius*, and Kentish Plover *A. alexandrinus* were recorded during the bird walk. Among them, one individual appeared distinct while foraging alongside three Little Ringed Plovers, exhibiting typical ‘stop-and-run’ feeding behavior. The bird was identified as a Caspian Plover based on sandy-brown upperparts, contrasting whitish lower tail-coverts, clean white forehead, lores, cheeks, supercilium, and throat with brown ear coverts, and a continuous grey-brown breast band lacking any rufous or black tones. The bill was slender and black, legs relatively long and greyish-green, and iris dark brown. Compared to Greater- *A. leschenaultii* and Tibetan Sand-Plovers *A. atrifrons*, the bird showed a slenderer structure, longer legs, finer bill, and clean white face, and a continuous grey-brown breast band (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). The scaled upperparts with pale fringes, diffuse brownish breast wash, broad whitish supercilium, and absence of adult breeding characters

indicate that the individual was a juvenile (first-winter) [107, 108] (Sangha 2021).



107. Juvenile (first winter) Caspian Plover showing narrow rufous scalloping on the upperparts.



108. Caspian Plover showing sand adhering to the bill after foraging. Photographed at Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh, India on 04 September 2025.

Both photos: Satya Prakash Pandey

There are no previous records of Caspian Plover from Central India including Chhattisgarh and neighbouring Madhya Pradesh. This sighting therefore, constitutes the first documented occurrence of Caspian Plover in Chhattisgarh. The sighting underscores the importance of seasonal grassland–wetland habitats in central India for supporting migratory waders, and suggests that this species may be more widely distributed than previously recognized.

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The Turkestan Short-toed Lark *Alaudala heinei*: An addition to the avifauna of Jammu & Kashmir, India

The Pargwal Wetland (32.803°N, 74.604°E; c.267 m asl), located on the flood plains of Chenab River, near Akhnoor, Jammu District, Jammu & Kashmir, is an important habitat for migratory birds. The wetland supports a mix of aquatic vegetation, grasslands, and sandy terrain attracting a variety of waterbirds, shorebirds and passerines.

On 02 November 2025, SKB, Vishal Kapur, and Shevait Khajuria were birding at Pargwal Wetland. At 0900 h, their car got stuck in a sandy flat. While looking around for a way out of the situation, SKB saw a flock of larks nearby (32.799°N, 74.594°E). Among them, one individual appeared distinctly different. He clicked some photographs, and shared them with GPS who tentatively identified the bird as a Turkestan Short-toed Lark *Alaudala heinei* based on a relatively short bill, distinctly streaked breast and upperparts, and fairly indistinct buffish to whitish supercilium (Alström & Donald 2023).

For a better documentation, SKB revisited the location on 05 November 2025, accompanied by Vishal Kapur, Shevait Khajuria, and Ajay Kumar. At about 1450 h, they spotted nine Sand Larks *A. raytal* along with two individuals of presumed Turkestan Short-toed Larks which showed distinctly streaked breast and upper parts. SKB clicked some photographs [109] and shared them again with GPS, who confirmed the identification of the individuals as Turkestan Short-toed Larks. Comparatively, the Sand Lark [110] looked more “dumpy”, is greyer and less contrastingly patterned above and, on the wings, with a more finely streaked mantle, and scapulars (Alström & Donald 2023). The images were also shared on Facebook group, “Ask IDS of Indian Birds,” where the identification of the birds as Turkestan Short-toed Lark was agreed upon.

For additional confirmation of the identification, we shared the photographs with Per Alström, who noted that the wings clearly indicate *A. heinei*, which is also the most plausible species given that it is the only long-distance migrant among the candidates. In particular, the 5th primary (counted from either the outer or inner side) appears considerably shorter relative to the wing tip than in the Asian Short-toed Lark *A. cheleensis*. Sriram Reddy also agreed that this individual was a Turkestan Short-toed Lark (Per Alström, in e-mail dated 14 November 2025).

The Turkestan Short-toed Lark breeds from west-central



109. Turkestan Short-toed Lark showing streaked breast and upper parts, photographed at Pargwal Wetland, Jammu on 05 November 2025.



110. Sand Lark photographed at Pargwal Wetland, Jammu on 05 November 2025.

Both photos: Sachin Kumar Bhagat

Turkey through southeastern Ukraine, southwestern Russia, most of central and southern Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan east to Kyrgyzstan and southern Mongolia; and in Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan (Alström & Donald 2023). During winter, some Turkestan Short-toed Larks of the subspecies *persica* or *heinei* move into Pakistan and northwestern India, where they may occur alongside the similar looking Sand Lark of the subspecies *adamsi*. Turkestan Short-toed Lark was previously treated as conspecific with the Mediterranean Short-toed Lark *A. rufescens* and often, wholly or partly with the Asian Short-toed Lark *A. cheleensis*, under the name Lesser Short-toed Lark *A. rufescens* (Alström & Donald 2023). Therefore, to put the present sighting in context, we reviewed the historical status of Asian/Lesser Short-toed Lark from the erstwhile state of Jammu & Kashmir (including Ladakh). Christian (2019) listed two specimen records of Asian/Lesser Short-toed Lark *sensu lato* from erstwhile Jammu & Kashmir. A specimen from Rupshu, now in the Union Territory of Ladakh (Stoliczka 1868), was later questioned by Hume (1870). Another specimen record exists from Gilgit (Scully 1881), however the location now again falls in Ladakh.

The checklist of the birds of Jammu & Kashmir (Kichloo et al. 2024; Kichloo 2025) does not include Turkestan Short-toed Lark. This sighting, therefore, marks the addition of the Turkestan Short-