

toed Lark to the avifauna of UT of Jammu & Kashmir, contributing to the region's growing avifaunal diversity.

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An escapee Narcondam Hornbill *Rhyticeros narcondami* from Chidiyatapu, South Andaman, Andaman & Nicobar Islands, India

The Narcondam Hornbill *Rhyticeros narcondami* is a rather small hornbill with a black body and entirely white tail, yellowish-white bill with a dark crimson base. It is a point endemic species restricted to the Narcondam Island (6.8 sq. km) in the Andaman Sea (Kinnaird & O'Brien 2007) and classified as Vulnerable by the IUCN (BirdLife International 2020). Though the Asian hornbills *Rhyticeros* spp. are generally strong fliers, enabling them to roam large parts of the forest landscape and even migrate long distances (Kemp 1995), the Narcondam Hornbill is non-migratory and movements of the endemic species are restricted to the tiny and isolated volcanic island (Naniwadekar 2020), lying c. 135 km from the northern-most tip of the Andaman group of islands.

While we were birding with Prodip Sarder, our sighting of a female Narcondam Hornbill at Chidiyatapu (11.512°N, 92.698°E), south of Port Blair, South Andaman, on 23 October 2025 at 1615h, came as a complete surprise [111]. After hearing its raucous call, we were able to locate it moving from bough to bough in the higher canopy of a fruiting Golden Rumph's Fig tree (Mock Bodh Tree) *Ficus rumphii*. The bird was observed for c. 5–6 minutes before it flew off in a south-eastern direction. We visited the site the following morning on 24 October 2025 and found it there again [112]. On both the days of our sighting, the bird was seen foraging in the higher canopy of a Golden Rumph's Fig tree in a wooded area situated adjacent to the road.

The occurrence of a straggling Narcondam Hornbill in the Andaman group of islands would be noteworthy. However, following discussion with local birders, it was apparent that the individual (and possibly another bird) was an escapee from Chidiyatapu Biological Park in South Andaman; a facility setup to also support captive breeding of Andaman & Nicobar endemics including Narcondam Hornbill (Anonymous 2017:3, 2019:5). The circumstances leading to its escape are unknown. Since our sightings, the bird was reported on at least three subsequent



111. The female Narcondam Hornbill photographed on 23 October 2025.



112. The female Narcondam Hornbill photographed at the same site on 24 October 2025.

Both photos: Sahil Zutshi

occasions in the same general area, all in November 2025, on 02 November (Singh 2025), on 05 November (Shaktivel 2025), and on 07 November (Mani 2025). Hence, its most unexpected presence in Chidiyatapu, is obviously through anthropogenic means having been captured and transported to the South Andaman. The bird has not been seen since then and most likely would have died or been killed.

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An unusual wheatear *Oenanthe sp.* in Rajasthan, India, not identifiable as the Cyprus Wheatear *Oenanthe cyprica*

On 4 January 2026, at 1240 h, we observed and photographed an unusual looking male wheatear *Oenanthe sp.* in the vicinity (26.809°N, 70.492°E) of Godawan Garh homestay near Sam, in the Desert National Park, Rajasthan. At the time, we did not recognize the significance of the bird and the initial photographs did not capture all diagnostic features. Thankfully, a couple of days later (after we had left the area) some excellent close-up photographs were sent to our guide, Raviraj Soman (The Mammoth Project) by Aliyar Rojani.

Aliyar was asking for identification advice and hoped that we might have had previous experience with Cyprus Wheatear *O. cyprica*, a species that is yet to be reported from South Asia. From the photographs [113–115], the bird was primarily black and orange, and strongly recalled a Cyprus Wheatear, a breeding endemic of Cyprus (an island in the eastern Mediterranean Sea) and the entire population winters in north-eastern Africa (Collar & Christie 2020).

Not being familiar with Cyprus Wheatear, we shared the images with a number of other expert birders in the UK and elsewhere. After careful comparison of the features, it was impossible to be sure of the bird's identity, especially due to similarities with other species in the region – Variable Wheatear *O. picata* or Pied Wheatear *O. pleschanka*.

We present some key features why this cannot be positively identified as Cyprus Wheatear and likely rule out Pied Wheatear as well.

1. The bird shows more extensive orange-toned colouration than would be normal in Cyprus Wheatear, in places like the rump, undertail and uppertail coverts; even the black feathers of the mantle are tinged with it [113, 114].
2. The crown and nape are unnaturally dark, even for an adult male Cyprus Wheatear. These would show a broad white forehead and supercilium, with just a dark crown – features which this individual clearly lacks [115].
3. The edges to the sides of the tail feathers of Cyprus Wheatear are normally white (and have never been reported as anything else) but in this bird they are orange [113, 114].
4. The black plumage without any pale feather fringes is unexpected in early January for either Pied or Cyprus Wheatears. Even in fresh plumage the wings and mantle of Pied Wheatear would have pale feather fringing and the cap would not be white, not black [115].
5. The tail pattern is odd, which if Pied Wheatear should have a narrow central black band and thinner black tail tip, mainly near the middle area [113, 114].
6. The primary projection is too short for Pied Wheatear [113, 114].

It would have been hard enough to be sure this was a Cyprus Wheatear even in Cyprus (Colin Richardson, 02 February 2026), the likelihood of one reaching India is very slim and there are other species that are more likely options. The orange colouration



113. Wheatear showing orange-toned colouration on tail sides and shorter primary projection.



114. Wheatear showing orange-toned colouration on rump, upper-tail and mantle.



115. Wheatear showing orange-toned underparts with dark crown and nape.

All photos: Digvijay Singh Rathore

may represent erythrisms (a congenital condition of abnormal redness), or could potentially result from external staining (e.g. dye), but this cannot be confirmed. If the orange colouration is disregarded or considered as white, then the bird appears more like a very dark-crowned *capistrata* morph of Variable Wheatear. As in this bird, *capistrata* shows a faint and narrow whitish line from the sides of the forehead/upper lores, almost continually to the sides of the nape. It is the only other black-and-white wheatear of the region that shows this feature, but this still