

Photo: Gaurav Dhotre



162. Hawfinch sitting on a bare treetop showing warm brown underparts and thick yellowish bill.

The Hawfinch occurs across most of Europe, parts of northern and central Asia, north-western Africa, parts of the Middle East, the Pamirs and Afghanistan. There are records of subspecies *humii* wintering in north-western Himalaya and uncommonly or locally in north-western Punjab and northern Pakistan (Clement & Christie 2020). There are several historical records of the species from the Punjab region of Pakistan (Whistler 1924) apart from a record from Baluchistan (Ticehurst 1927).

There are only three known records of the species from the political boundaries of India, but all are from the parts of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh presently under the administration of Pakistan, across the Line of Control (LoC). A female (USNM#265039) was collected by C. H. Crump from Chatter [=Chatta] at c.600m [=2,000 feet] in Muzaffarabad, Kashmir on 20 February 1908 (Orrel 2026). Four days later, a male (MCZ#149851) was collected by him at Domail [=Domail], near Muzaffarabad, on 24 February 1908 (Rarities 1908; Harvard University & Morris 2026). The third, and a more recent record is of an individual photographed at Aliabad, Gilgit-Baltistan, on 29 May 2017 (Shah 2017), again from across the LoC but politically within Ladakh.

Though georeferencing of the male MCZ specimen was across the LoC (Harvard University & Morris 2026), there has been a likely confusion with a locality with the same name near Jammu, leading to earlier interpretations of placing the record within the Indian-administered territory, and hence not detailed in a summary (see Praveen & Kichloo 2020) of records seen across the LoC. This has now been rectified and the record is moved to Domail near Muzaffarabad (Rarities 1908).

In summary, our observation happens to be the first record of the species from India, outside of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh regions, and also the first for the state of Uttarakhand. In all probabilities, this would be the first record that is clearly within the LoC.

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Lapland Longspur *Calcarius lapponicus*: An addition to the avifauna of Ladakh

The Lapland Longspur *Calcarius lapponicus* breeds across Arctic regions of Eurasia and North America and winters southwards into temperate regions of both continents (Hussell & Montgomerie 2024). Within the Indian Subcontinent, the species was first recorded from Bhutan (Chophel & Sherub 2016) and was subsequently documented from Namdapha National Park, Arunachal Pradesh, India (Mekola et al. 2023). Here we report the first record of the species from Ladakh, India.

On 06 February 2026, during the Asian Waterbird Census in Changthang, Ladakh, PG observed a small sparrow sized bird beneath a *Salix* tree near Khaldo Bagh Plantations, Hanle, eastern Ladakh (32.773°N, 78.984°E; c.4,300 m asl) at 1520 h. Initially, the bird could not be identified using the binoculars, so few photographs were taken for proper identification. Subsequently, TD and RD also observed the bird. PG uploaded the images into the Merlin Bird Identification App which suggested it as a Lapland Longspur. The bird showed pinkish-buff bill with black tip, pale ochre supercilium, double white wing-bars, and chestnut edged greater coverts and tertials confirming it as Lapland Longspur [163]. Extensive black on the crown feathers and black-centred feathers on the throat and upper breast indicated a male in winter plumage (Shirihai & Svensson 2018).

The bird was distinguished from smaller Rustic Bunting *Emberiza rustica* by a brownish grey rump, less extensively streaked flanks, and more prominent chestnut-edged greater coverts. It differed from the Eurasian Reed Bunting *E. schoeniclus* by more distinct whitish double wing-bars, more rufous-tinged greater coverts, and pale pinkish bill with dark tip. Separation from Little Bunting *E. pusilla* was based on its substantially larger size, proportionately longer primary projection, pinkish bill, and

Photo: Padma Gyalpo



163. Lapland Longspur, photographed on 06 February 2026 from Hanle, Ladakh, showing extensive black on the crown, pale ochre supercilium, prominent white wing bars, and chestnut-edged greater coverts and tertials.

more extensively chestnut-edged wing coverts.

The bird was again sighted by the same team the following morning at around 0800 h. It was observed foraging alongside Horned Larks *Eremophila alpestris*, although it did not follow the larks when it took flight. During flight it gave repeated *pr'r'rt* calls. Later, numerous observers photographed the bird between 06–16 February 2026 at the same location (eBird 2026). The last record of the bird was on 22 February 2026 (Gyalpo 2026).

The Lapland Longspur is not listed in any of the standard references on the birds of Ladakh (Ward 1907; Osmaston 1925, 1926; Sillem 1934; Vaurie 1972; Holmes 1986; Pfister 2004; Grimmett et al. 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012a; b; Delany et al. 2014; Sharma et al. 2021) and also not in the most recent checklist of birds of Ladakh (Gyalpo 2024). The present observation therefore constitutes the first record of the species from Ladakh and only the second confirmed record from India.

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Status of the Eurasian Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus* in the Kashmir Valley, Jammu & Kashmir, India

The Eurasian Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus* is a widespread and common breeder across much of the Palearctic region (Byers et al. 2010). This medium-sized bunting is particularly distinctive during the breeding season, when the male exhibits a characteristic head pattern: a blackish head and breast, a prominent white sub-moustachial stripe, and a conspicuous white nape (Grimmett et al. 1998; Byers et al. 2010). It winters in the north-western India, extending as far east as the Delhi region (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). The species is considered rare in India, with scattered reports from Jammu & Kashmir, Ladakh, Punjab, Haryana, and Delhi (Grimmett et al. 1998, 2011). In Ladakh, the adjoining region of Kashmir Valley, the Eurasian Reed Bunting was recorded ‘very occasionally’ during the Southampton University Ladakh Expeditions during 1976–1982 period (Williams & Delany 1986). Recent sightings have also been reported from the region (Hussain et al. 2021; eBird 2026). Within Gilgit-Baltistan, the species is a winter visitor (Biddulph 1881) and an uncommon passage migrant through the central parts of Gilgit-Baltistan, mainly in Hunza, Gilgit and Diamer (Shah 2025).

Regarding Eurasian Reed Bunting’s status in Ambala District of British Punjab, Jones (1919) stated—“Probably a regular winter visitor, a few being seen almost every season. A male and female procured near Jagadhri, 17th February 1918”. This suggests that the species may have been more widespread and regularly occurring in northern India in the past. In contrast, recent records from the region outside Kashmir and Ladakh, are