

slenderer structure usually shown by the Bimaculated Lark. The bill was notably heavy and deep-based and the bird exhibited a large, bold black breast patch that appeared extensive and nearly merging at the centre of the throat. The upperparts appeared relatively plain with limited streaking, while the underparts were largely clean and pale. Facial patterning was subdued, lacking the stronger facial contrast often shown by the Bimaculated Lark (Shirihai & Svensson 2018). Flight photographs showed broad wings with diagnostic prominent trailing edge and white outer tail feathers (Shirihai & Svensson 2018), with a slightly longer tail than expected for Bimaculated Lark [160]. The pictures of underwing taken by other birders show slightly dark underwing, darker than what is shown by Bimaculated Lark (Gyalpo 2025b). Taken together, these features confidently separate the bird from Bimaculated Lark and confirm its identity as Calandra Lark.

This may represent one of the first instances in India in which a species new to the national avifauna was initially recognised through collaborative identification on iNaturalist before formal regional acceptance. It also demonstrates the importance of multiple observers, photographic documentation, and subsequent review in the identification of rare birds. This sequence demonstrates the value of retaining photographs and revisiting records when additional evidence becomes available. It also illustrates how online biodiversity platforms can facilitate the recognition and subsequent validation of species that might otherwise remain overlooked.

The known range of Calandra Lark extends as far as Afghanistan (Praveen 2018) and does not extend to Pakistan or northern India (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). This observation therefore represents the first confirmed photographic record for the country and the subcontinent and a significant eastward vagrancy. The occurrence may reflect long-distance dispersal or weather-assisted displacement from western populations. The cold desert and steppe-like habitats of Ladakh may provide suitable conditions for occasional vagrants, though these regions remain relatively under-surveyed during winter.

Several prior reports of Bimaculated Lark from Ladakh and adjacent regions exist in eBird (Delany 1981; Faustino 2000; Nubu 2025). Ladakh eBird reviewers are encouraged to contact these observers and establish the correct identity as these may have involved Calandra Larks.

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The Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes* in the Corbett Tiger Reserve, Uttarakhand, India

On 23 November 2025, at 1400 h, HCJ, SSS, and AC saw and photographed a large finch in Dhela Zone (29.402°N, 78.973°E, c.327m asl) of the Corbett Tiger Reserve, Uttarakhand, India [161]. The bird was perched on top of a dead tree in a dry forested stream for nearly five minutes before it flew away. It was identified as a possible Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*. GD searched for the bird at the same location later during the afternoon but could not see it again. AC shared images with MS who confirmed the identification of the bird as an adult non-breeding Hawfinch, based on the features including a large dull yellowish bill, black on lores, bib and above the bill; brown head, grey nape, brown cheek and ear-coverts, warm brown coloration to underparts and scapulars; black wings with white coverts.



Photo: Huang Chung Jung

161. Hawfinch showing dull yellowish bill, black on lores, bib and above the bill with white coverts on black wings.

On 24 November 2025, MS, AC, GD, PK and JS searched the bird at Dhela from 0640 h to 0830 h. At 0651 h, the bird came on a bare treetop in the same stream where it was seen on the previous day, and was seen and photographed till 0656 h when it flew away [162]. The bird was reported from the same location on 25 November at 0650 h (Mehta 2025a) and later at 1424 h for about 50–60 minutes (Mehta 2025b). It was observed perched on bare branches and also coming down to feed on the ground (Mehta 2025b). However, it was not observed at this site since then.

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