

for use as nest lining or nest construction, given that Brown-headed Barbet uses wood chips and excavated material in nests which are usually constructed in cavities of a dead or partly dead tree trunk or branch. The lack of obvious surface invertebrates does not exclude hidden prey, and the apparent deliberate retrieval and transport of fragments could be for either digestive or nesting purposes; however, ingestion of bark material is unique. Comparable cases of true bark ingestion have not been documented in Asian barbets, though bark-stripping and wood-pecking behaviours are noted in related groups such as woodpeckers (Tate 1973; Winkler et al. 1995). In Malaysia, "woodpecking" has been observed with a Red-throated Barbet *P. mystacophanos* to extract insect larvae, representing a rare instance of true woodpecker-like foraging (Short 1973). The nature of this behaviour indicates deliberate foraging rather than incidental excavation and suggests that some barbets exhibit woodpecker-like feeding behaviour and capabilities, with implications for understanding feeding flexibility and evolutionary relationships. Bark itself may provide limited direct nutrition but can harbour secondary food sources such as fungi, lichens, or concealed invertebrates; alternatively, bark fragments might serve a functional role in digestion. Without repeated observations or gut/behavioural-study data, it is not possible to distinguish between opportunistic foraging, gizzard-related ingestion, or transport for nesting. The observation therefore highlights the need for additional records and for any future observers to document context, and whether fragments are retained at a nest site, or whether multiple individuals exhibit similar behaviour.

I thank Dr Anand Krishnan (JNCASR, Bengaluru), Dr Ashwin Viswanathan (NCF), and an anonymous referee for inputs and review.

References

- Ali, S., & Ripley, S. D., 1983. *Handbook of the birds of India and Pakistan together with those of Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and Sri Lanka. Formicivores to pittas, 2nd (Hardback)*. (Sponsored by Bombay Natural History Society.) Oxford University Press, Delhi. Vol. 4 of 10 vols. Pp. i-xvi, 1–267+5.
- Dean, W. R. J., & Milton, S. J., 1991. Grit ingestion, internal morphology and diet of granivorous birds with particular reference to seed size. *South African Journal of Science* 87:72–75.
- Forshaw, J. M., 2010. *Parrots of the world, 1st edn*. Christopher Helm, London. Pp. 1–328.
- Gionfriddo, J. P., & Best, L. B., 1995. Grit use by birds: a review. *Current Ornithology* 13:89–148.
- Krishnan, A., 2021. Brown-headed Barbet (*Psilopogon zeylanicus*), version 2.0. In *Birds of the World* (T. S. Schulenberg and B. K. Keeney, Editors). Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY, USA. Webpage URL: <https://birdsoftheworld.org/bow/species/brhbar1/cur/introduction>. [Accessed on 20 June 2026].
- Marshall, C. H. T., & Marshall, G. F. L., 1871. *A monograph of the Capitoninae or Scansorial Barbets*. Published by the Authors, London.
- Rusch, D. H., DeStefano, S., Reynolds, M. C., & Lauten, D. J., 2020. Ruffed Grouse (*Bonasa umbellus*), version 1.0. In *Birds of the World* (A. F. Poole and F. B. Gill, Editors). Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY, USA. Webpage URL: <https://birdsoftheworld.org/bow/species/rufgro/cur/introduction>. [Accessed on 20 June 2026].
- Sahil, 2025. Webpage URL: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S275543721>. [Accessed on 20 June 2026].
- Short, L. L., 1973. "Woodpecking" by a Red-throated Barbet. *The Auk* 90 (4):909–910.
- Short, L. L., & Horne, J. F. M., 2001. *Toucans, Barbets and Honeyguides*, 1st edn. Oxford University Press, Oxford. Pp. 1–526.
- Tate, J., 1973. Methods and Annual Sequence of Foraging by the Sapsucker. *The Auk* 90 (4):840–856.
- Winkler, H., Christie, D. A., & Nurney, D., 1995. *Woodpeckers. A guide to the woodpeckers of the world*, 1st edn. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston. Pp. 1–406.

– Sahil Zutshi

Sahil Zutshi, Irupidam, Achalgarh Road, Mount Abu, Sirohi District 307 501, Rajasthan, India.
E-mail: sahilzutshi@hotmail.com

Status of the Little Owl *Athene noctua* in Himachal Pradesh, India

The Little Owl *Athene noctua* is a compact, plump, and relatively small owl with broad and rounded wings (Holt et al. 2020). It is sandy-brown in colour, with white spotting on the upperparts and white streaking on the crown, and has brown streaking over whitish underparts (Grimmett et al. 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). The Little Owl is larger than the similar Spotted Owlet *A. brama*, and the two species are sympatric only in Baluchistan (Pakistan) (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). The Little Owl shows streaking on the crown, breast, and flanks, and broader whitish bands on tail, compared to the Spotted Owlet showing a spotted crown, scaled or barred underparts, and narrower banding on tail (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). This note documents the sightings of the Little Owl from the Lahaul and Spiti District of Himachal Pradesh, India.

On 23 August 2016, AV and KG reached Thinam (32.312°N, 78.063°E; c.4,665 m asl), a temporary settlement in the Spiti Valley, Lahaul and Spiti District, Himachal Pradesh. Beyond this point, they trekked along the mountain base as the dirt road ends here. After c.1 km, in a rocky area with numerous large boulders scattered across the terrain (32.317°N, 78.062°E; c.4,715 m asl), they observed an owl. It was immediately identified as a Little Owl as per features, and given that no other similar species occur in this habitat. The individual was shy and did not allow a close approach. A few photographs were taken with binoculars and phone before we left the site [203].



203. Little Owl at Thinam on 23 August 2016.

On 07 October 2017, Rima Dhillon, Sarabjeet Kaur, Navjit Singh, and Narbir Kahlon from the Chandigarh Bird Club were birding in the Lahaul and Spiti District. While travelling between Batal (32.358°N, 77.619°E; c.4,020 m asl) and Chhota Dara (32.294°N, 77.522°E; c.3,800 m asl) in Lahaul, they reached an unnamed location, roughly halfway between these two settlements. They observed an owl perched on a boulder near the road and identified it as a Little Owl (Kaur 2017). The area lies between the mountains and the Chandrabhaga River, and the habitat was boulder-strewn and rocky. A few photographs were taken before continuing their journey.

While birding around Tashigang village (32.293°N, 78.053°E; c.4,430 m asl), Spiti, on the afternoon of 08 June 2025, MAS noticed an owl, which flew close to him and settled on a nearby rock. The individual was seen carrying a vole *Alticola cf. stoliczkanus* that it had probably hunted. It was identified as a Little Owl based on features. The same individual was observed again a few days later, roosting during the day on a large rock on the hillside. The site was surrounded by stony slopes, supporting sparse herbaceous cover and scrub, dominated by

Lonicera spinosa and *Caragana versicolor*. On 12 June 2025, CA, DO, and AJ visited the site and recorded the owl at the same roosting location in the afternoon, along with MAS and KG [204]. Subsequently, on 07 July 2025, MAS and KG observed two fledglings of the species close by [205]. The nest site, which was later identified with the help of locals, was a natural cavity in one of the cliffs closer to the village, where fledglings were observed (Mohammad 2025a), confirming that the species was breeding locally [206, 207].



C. Abhinav

204. Little Owl on a day-roost at Tashigang on 12 June 2025.



Mohammad Abdus Shakur

205. A fledgling of Little Owl at Tashigang on 07 July 2025.



Kalzang Gurmet

206. Nesting hole of Little Owl at Tashigang.



Mohammad Abdus Shakur

207. Habitat at nesting site and arrow indicates the nest.

The breeding site was located c.200 m from its day-roost site. We followed recommended practices and guidelines (Barve et al. 2020) for documentation of the nest observations; and the measurements of the nest and nest site were taken after the breeding season was over. It was in a crevice c.8.5 m from the ground; the depth of the cavity hole was 45 cm and the diameter of its opening was 15 cm. Marks of whitish faecal matter were noticed on the rock below this opening and on the ground. A conversation with the locals revealed that this species was very vocally active at this location during March and April, suggesting that they might have been vocalizing during the mating season. The owl family was seen at this site regularly till mid-July 2025. An adult bird was seen occasionally during winter of 2025–26, as per local residents of the village. Garry Bhatti spotted the species at the same location along with his birding tour members on 11 November 2025, 08 March 2026 and 24 June 2026 (Garry Bhatti, pers. comm., dated 05 July 2026). The breeding of Little Owl was again recorded at the same location by MAS, when he recorded two immature birds near the nest hole (Mohammad 2026). The known breeding season of the species in South Asia is from March–June, and the species builds nests in rock crevices or mud cliffs and in tree-holes (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012).

On 27 September 2025, while walking in the fields around Kibber village, MAS flushed an owl roosting amidst rocks in a nullah (32.339°N, 78.009°E; c.4,176 m asl). It had the typical undulating flight, observed during the previous sightings of the Little Owl, and was confirmed from the flight shots during the encounter (Mohammad 2025b).

There have been a few other sight records of the Little Owl from the Spiti Valley. All known records are mentioned in the Table 1. The records from same location and same year are not mentioned separately. There might be a possibility that more records of Little Owl exist from Spiti, given the ongoing camera-trapping research and systematic bird surveys in the region conducted by different organisations including Nature Conservation Foundation.

Table 1. Records of Little Owl from Lahaul and Spiti District, Himachal Pradesh

S. No.	Date	Location	Remarks	Reference
1.	Undated, before 2016	Monkor, Spiti	Sight record by Tanzin Thuktan and Rinchen Tobge	pers. comm. Tanzin Thuktan
2.	23 August 2016	Thinam, Spiti	First photographic record	Vikrant (2016), this work.
3.	07 October 2017	Between Batal and Chhota Dara, Lahaul	Photographic record	Kaur (2017), this work.
4.	26 December 2017	Near Chicham Bridge	Photographed	Kesangchunit (2024)
5.	29 July 2018	Near Kibber, Spiti	A record of Short-eared Owl <i>Asio flammeus</i> is mentioned in the text. However, at this particular date the species is unlikely in Spiti, as it is a winter visitor to India. The photograph provided is probably of Little Owl, as it seems to be more compact and paler than the former. The photograph is of lower resolution to be completely sure.	Dutta et al. (2022)
6.	Between 12 and 15 August 2019	Kibber Village	Sight record by Pronoy Baidya and Jalmesh Karapurkar	Pronoy Baidya, pers. comm., dated 20 October 2025
7.	22 February 2020	Gue, Spiti	Unconfirmed sight record	Sharma (2020)
8.	24 June 2021	Exact location in Spiti unknown	Unconfirmed sight record. It seems that the observer has combined data/observations from several checklists because of the presence of unlikely species at the place mentioned in the checklist	Nair (2021)
9.	25 May 2023	Between Dhar Lung Wooh and Demul	Unverifiable sight record	Srinivasan (2023)
10.	June – August 2025	Tashigang, Spiti	First breeding record	Mohammad (2025a), this work
11.	27 September 2025	Kibber, Spiti	Photographic record	Mohammad (2025b), this work
12.	June – July 2026	Tashigang, Spiti	Breeding at same site	Mohammad (2026), this work

Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) mention Little Owl as a resident of Himalayas from Baltistan to northern Sikkim from 2,715 to 4,700 m asl. Their distribution map shows this range beyond the borders of Himachal Pradesh, extending south-eastwards through the adjoining Tibetan Plateau. Grimmett et al. (1998, 2011) mention and depict Little Owl in India, only from Ladakh and northern Sikkim. Praveen (2025) included Himachal Pradesh within the distribution range of the species, based on some of the above-mentioned records in Table 1, which are on eBird (eBird 2025). The species is missing from the checklist of birds of Himachal Pradesh (Lakshminarasimha 2017). Dhadwal & Kanwar (2018) mentioned Little Owl from Spiti in their checklist, however, the species account was not given due to unavailability of photograph. The species was also recorded for the first time in Uttarakhand in Upper Bhagirathi River Basin at 4,240 m (Joshi et al. 2025). This note also mentions the presence of the species in Lahaul and Spiti, citing a bogus reference, “Marshall, A. J. (1984)” titled “Notes on birds from Lahaul and Spiti, Himachal Pradesh” apparently in the Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society 81 (2), pp. 364–367. No such note exists in the said volume of Journal of Bombay Natural History Society and no such author with the said name exists in known ornithological bibliographies, for e.g., Pittie (2025). Several other references cited in Joshi et al. (2025) are also bogus, questioning the reliability of the record. On communication with the authors, no reply was received. There, however, exists an unpublished photographic record of the species from Uttarakhand on social media from Chopta, Rudraprayag District dated 15 October 2015 (Negi 2015), which became the basis of its inclusion in the checklist of birds of Uttarakhand (Mohan & Sondhi 2024).

All records of Little Owl presented in Table 1 are from the past decade, however considering the overall range of the species, these records are not unexpected. The record by AV and KG from

Thinam appears to be the first photographic record of the Little Owl from Himachal Pradesh, while the sighting from Tashigang appears to be the first breeding record for the state. These multiple records reveal a previously undocumented distribution range of Little Owl in the Lahaul and Spiti District of Himachal Pradesh. The species has not been recorded previously during the winter, likely due to coverage issues during winter season, however present records confirm Little Owl as a breeding resident in Spiti Valley.

We thank Navjit Singh, Rima Dhillon, Sarabjeet Kaur, Narbir Kahlon, Garry Bhatti, Pronoy Baidya, and Jalmesh Karapurkar for sharing their records.

References

- Barve, S., Raman, T. R. S., Datta, A., & Jathar, G., 2020. Guidelines for conducting research on the nesting biology of Indian birds. *Indian Birds* 16 (1):10–11.
- Dhadwal, D. S., & Kanwar, B., 2018. *Birds of Himachal Pradesh (Non-Passerine)*. Published by the author, Himachal Pradesh, India. Vol. 1 of 2 vols. Pp. 1–301.
- Dutta, R., Singh, A., Sharief, A., Kumar, V., Singh, H., Bhattacharjee, S., Joshi, B. D., Sharma, L. K., Kumar, S., & Mukherjee, T., 2022. Current status of avifauna diversity in Lahaul and Spiti, Himachal Pradesh: Synthesis from current and past surveys. *Indian Journal of Ecology* 49 (4):1468–1481.
- eBird, 2025. Webpage URL: <https://ebird.org/map/litowl1>. [Accessed on 9 July 2026].
- Grimmett, R., Inskipp, C., & Inskipp, T., 1998. *Birds of the Indian Subcontinent*, 1st edn. Christopher Helm, A & C Black, London. Pp. 1–888.
- Grimmett, R., Inskipp, C., & Inskipp, T., 2011. *Birds of the Indian Subcontinent*, 2nd edn. Oxford University Press & Christopher Helm, London. Pp. 1–528.
- Holt, D. W., Berkley, R., Deppe, C., Enríquez, P. L., Petersen, J. L., Rangel Salazar, J. L., Segars, K. P., Wood, K. L., Kirwan, G. M., Christie, D., & Marks, J. S., 2020. Little Owl (*Athene noctua*), version 1.0. In *Birds of the World* (J. del Hoyo, A. Elliott, J. Sargatal, D. A. Christie, and E. de Juana, Editors). Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY, USA. Webpage URL: <https://birdsoftheworld.org/bow/species/litowl1/cur/introduction>. [Accessed on 09 July 2026].
- Joshi, A., Ponnud, D., Dubey, V. K., & Sathyakumar, S., 2025. Filling the gap: first regional record of the Little Owl (*Strigiformes: Strigidae*) from Uttarakhand, India. *Journal of Threatened Taxa* 17 (11):28007–28010.

- Kaur, S., 2017. Webpage URL: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S223320196>. [Accessed on 09 July 2026].
- Kesangchun, 2024. Webpage URL: <https://www.inaturalist.org/observations/198224424>. [Accessed on 09 July 2026].
- Lakshminarasimha, R., 2017. *Himachal Pradesh bird checklist. 1st ed.* Pp. 70.
- Mohammad, A. S., 2025a. Webpage URL: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S367879554>. [Accessed on 09 July 2026].
- Mohammad, A. S., 2025b. Webpage URL: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S276094889>. [Accessed on 09 July 2026].
- Mohammad, A. S., 2026. Webpage URL: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S366598529>. [Accessed on 09 July 2026].
- Mohan, D., & Sondhi, S., 2024. *An Updated Checklist and Bibliography of the Birds of Uttarakhand, second edition.* Uttarakhand Forest Department, Dehradun. Pp. 96.
- Nair, A., 2021. Webpage URL: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S92075621>. [Accessed on 09 July 2026].
- Negi, Y., 2015. Webpage URL: <https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=429413173933559&set=a.279024372305774>. [Accessed on 09 July 2026].
- Pittie, A., 2025. *A Bibliography of South Asian Ornithology 1713 to 2022. 4th ed.*
- Praveen, J., 2025. *Birds of India - The New Synopsis.* Nature Conservation Foundation, Mysuru. Pp. i-xlvii, 1–468.
- Rasmussen, P. C., & Anderton, J. C., 2012. *Birds of South Asia: the Ripley guide: attributes and status*, 2nd edn. Smithsonian Institution and Lynx Edicions, Washington, D.C. and Barcelona. Vol. 2 of 2 vols. Pp. 1–683.
- Sharma, A., 2020. Webpage URL: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S65233849>. [Accessed on 09 July 2026].
- Srinivasan, S., 2023. Webpage URL: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S139175007>. [Accessed on 09 July 2026].
- Vikrant, A., 2016. Webpage URL: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S369908457>. [Accessed on 09 July 2026].

– C. Abhinav, Ankit Vikrant, Mohammad Abdus Shakur, Kalzang Gurmet, Dipender Othangba & Amir Jaspa

C. Abhinav, Village & P.O. Ghurkari, Kangra 176001, Himachal Pradesh, India.

E-mail: drabhinav.c@gmail.com [CA] [Corresponding author]

Ankit Vikrant, Village Dabsai, P.O. Bhira, Hamirpur 177001, Himachal Pradesh, India.

E-mail: ankitvikrant74@gmail.com [AV]

Mohammad Abdus Shakur, Centre for Ecological Sciences, Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru, 560012, Karnataka, India. E-mail: abdusshakur.mohammad@gmail.com [MAS]

Kalzang Gurmet, V.P.O. Kibber, Tehsil Spiti, District Lahaul and Spiti, 172114, Himachal Pradesh, India. E-mail: cgurmet@gmail.com [KG]

Dipender Othangba, Village & P.O. Jobrang, District Lahaul and Spiti, 175133, Himachal Pradesh, India. E-mail: othangba@gmail.com [DO]

Amir Jaspa, Village Jasrath, Lahaul and Spiti District, 175139, Himachal Pradesh, India.

E-mail: spider00001@gmail.com [AJ]

The Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella* from the Mishmi Hills: An addition to the avifauna of Arunachal Pradesh, India

The Mishmi Hills, located in eastern Arunachal Pradesh, India are well known for their high avian diversity. The region encompasses parts of Upper and Lower Dibang Valley, Lohit, and Anjaw Districts.

On 24 November 2025, during a birdwatching tour organized by Mrugaya Xpeditions, a bunting-like bird was observed at 1300 h, while travelling from Mayodia towards Tiwarigaon, Arunachal Pradesh. The bird was seen in open habitat comprising rocky hillsides with grasses and sparse tree cover, feeding on grass seeds along the roadside. The bird was observed for approximately five minutes during which photographs were obtained to confirm its identification. It was bold but frequently flew short distances and disappeared into dense grasses before reappearing. We finally lost the sight of the bird when a heavy vehicle passed by. At first sight, the bird looked like one of the yellow-coloured buntings but much larger than the similar looking Yellow-breasted Bunting *Emberiza aureola* and Chestnut Bunting *E. rutila*.

The bird showed a chestnut rump and upper tail coverts, as well as prominent white outer tail feathers visible in flight. Based on these characters, together with its large size and overall

structure, the bird was identified as a Yellowhammer *E. citrinella* [208].



Omkar Dharwadkar

208. Yellowhammer photographed on 24 November 2025 from Arunachal Pradesh, India.

In India, the Yellowhammer has been recorded from the Western Himalaya from Kashmir, Ladakh, Himachal, and Uttarakhand (Praveen 2025). The nearest known record to the present observation is from Lubra village in Nepal, approximately 1,180 km west of the Mishmi Hills (Ghimire, 2025). This observation therefore represents the easternmost record of the species in the Indian Subcontinent and the first record for Arunachal Pradesh (Singh 1995; Choudhury 2006; Singh et al. 2013).

Populations breeding from eastern Europe eastwards to south-central Siberia and north-central Mongolia are believed to winter in South Asia (Copete 2020). The observed individual may therefore belong to the subspecies *E. c. erythrogenys*, the expected subspecies in India, although subspecific assignment is difficult on the basis of the available evidence.

References

- Choudhury, A., 2006. Notable bird records from Mizoram in north-east India. *Forktail* 22:152–155.
- Copete, J. L., 2020. Yellowhammer (*Emberiza citrinella*), version 1.0. In *Birds of the World* (J. del Hoyo, A. Elliott, J. Sargatal, D. A. Christie, and E. de Juana, Editors). Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY, USA. Website URL: <https://doi.org/10.2173/bow.yellow2.01> [Accessed on 05 December 2025].
- Ghimire, M., 2025. Webpage URL: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S275228609> [Accessed on 05 December 2025].
- Praveen, J., 2025. *Birds of India - The New Synopsis.* Nature Conservation Foundation, Mysuru. Pp. i-xlvii, 1–468.
- Singh, P., 1995. Recent bird records from Arunachal Pradesh, India. *Forktail* 10:65–104 (1994).
- Singh, K.M., Kumawat, M.M., Phurailatpam, A.K., Rao, V.V., Pandey, A.K., 2013. *Birds of Arunachal Pradesh (A Compilation)*. College of Horticulture and Forestry, Central Agricultural University, Pasighat, Arunachal Pradesh, India. Pp. 206.

– Omkar Dharwadkar, Jayanta Dutta, Taranpreet Gulati & Rakhi Basu

Omkar Dharwadkar, Mrugaya Xpeditions, 407, III-A, Susheela Sea Winds, Alto-Vaddem, Vasco-da-gama 403401, Goa.

E-mail: omkardhr_27@yahoo.in [OM] [Corresponding author]

Jayanta Dutta, Village Natin Ronagagora gaon, PS Tinsukia 786147, Assam.

E-mail: jibondutta31@gmail.com

Taranpreet Gulati S/1, Second Floor, Block A, Adwalpalkar Saphire, Taleigao 403001, Goa.

E-mail: taran.gulati@gmail.com

Rakhi Basu, S/1, Second Floor, Block A, Adwalpalkar Saphire, Taleigao 403001, Goa.

E-mail: rakhibasu@gmail.com