

Rediscovery of the Central Indian Painted Bush-Quail *Perdicula erythrorhyncha blewitti* from the Mahendragiri hills, Eastern Ghats, Odisha with a review of its past records

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The Painted Bush-Quail *Perdicula erythrorhyncha* is a small, largely resident quail of the hill forests, scrub, and grasslands of peninsular India (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012a; Praveen 2025). The species comprises two recognized subspecies, with the nominate *P. e. erythrorhyncha* occurring mainly in the Western Ghats, while *P. e. blewitti* occupies the central and eastern part of the species' range (Praveen 2025). The latter was originally described from Raipur, Chhattisgarh and has historically been reported from eastern Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, and adjoining parts of eastern India (Hume 1874; Hume & Marshall 1880; Ali & Ripley 1987). Although *P. e. blewitti* has traditionally been considered relatively widespread in central and eastern India, the taxon has remained undocumented for several decades despite most parts of central and eastern India being birded extensively by citizen scientists. It has been reported as one of the least-known of our *Perdicula* taxa (Maheswaran et al. 2022). Here, I report a photographic record from Mahendragiri hills, Gajapati district in southern Odisha, one of the prominent peaks in the Eastern Ghats.

On 13 August 2026, during a research expedition, a pair of Painted Bush-Quails were sighted in a grassland patch in the Mahendragiri hills (18.968°N, 84.368°E), at 0818 h [1–3]. The male was identified as this species based on the broad white frontal band, narrow black frontal band, limited black on the chin, and relatively pale rufous underparts with conspicuous dark spotting, characters consistent with the diagnostic features of the species (Grimmett et al. 2026). Additionally, the width of the frontal band appears to be broader than that of the Western Ghats birds indicating that they belong to *blewitti* (Hume & Marshall 1880; Ali & Ripley 1987; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012a). The female did not have the white frontal band but its plumage was consistent with the photographs of females reported from the Western Ghats. Both birds were observed foraging together in the grassland. The birds remained in close proximity while actively searching for food. The pair was encountered again on 15 August 2026 at 0706 h at a similar locality, where they were observed foraging together in a similar manner. The habitat consisted of an open grassland patch interspersed with low shrubs and scattered vegetation. The repeated observation of a pair at the same locality suggests that the species may occur regularly in suitable grassland habitat in the Mahendragiri hills. No calls were heard during these observations.



[1] A Painted Bush-Quail male from Mahendragiri hills on 13 August 2026 showing white frontal band. All photos: Siddhanta Kumar Mohanta



[2] Painted Bush-Quail female seen along with the male in [1]



[3] Painted Bush-Quail male from the same locality as [1] on 15 August 2026.

Maps in contemporary field guides (Grimmett et al. 2011, 2026; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012b) give the impression that it is widespread in central and east-central India. However, it is reported to have no recent authentic records (Praveen 2025) and its historical range only included the states of Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh. Its occurrence within Odisha, apart from West Bengal and Bihar, remains uncorroborated though it has been reported till the border (Praveen 2025). Hence, I resorted to a comprehensive status review of definitive as well as speculative records from

its historical range thereby correcting some of these distributions. All primary and secondary literature was consulted and museum records from www.gbif.org were accessed.

Hume (1874:512) described the bush-quail from Raipur, based on several specimens obtained by F. R. Blewitt and possibly, also specimens from Balaghat by R. Thompson, that he had received by then. Most of them are in NHMUK, London (Table 1). Later, it was described as a widespread and very abundant bird by R. Thompson in present-day eastern Maharashtra, particular in southern and eastern parts of Chandrapur district (then Chanda district) (Hume & Marshall 1880:127). Several additional localities have also been mentioned, presumably of specimens obtained by different correspondents of Hume. This include Surguja, Sambalpur, Nawagarh (Bastar), and Bailadila [=Bela-Dila Plateau] in Chhattisgarh; Mandla, Seoni, southern Narsinghpur, the Denwa Valley below the Pachmarhi hills, and Delakhari in Madhya Pradesh; and Bhandara from eastern Maharashtra (Hume & Marshall 1880:127). Blewitt's own account states that it is extensively distributed in Raipur and Bhandara and south-western portions of Sambalpur district. He specifically states that he has not secured a specimen on the 'other half' and indicates that it may be absent there (Hume & Marshall 1880:127). It was also collected by Blanford near Sironcha in south-eastern Maharashtra, presumably in the high jungles between Chandrapur and Sironcha, perhaps from a locality known by name 'Udipur' (Blanford 1869:190, 1898:464; Ball 1874:428). Blanford (1898:122) included only Chota Nagpur [=Chutia Nagpur] and forests in the eastern parts of Central Provinces in its distribution; specifically calling out Mandla, Balaghat, Seoni, Chanda [=Chandrapur], Raipur, Sironcha, and Bastar. Hence, it is surprising that the present-day rarity status in east-central India is hardly reflected in the historical accounts. It may be noted that the only reference to its occurrence in Eastern Ghats is from Lammasingi in Visakhapatnam hills of north-eastern Andhra Pradesh (Price 1980:408), and in fact the last authentic report before my photographs. Humayun Abdulali collected one from Supkhar (now in Kanha Tiger Reserve), Madhya Pradesh on 07 March 1959 (LACM#32824). This happens to be the last museum specimen collected of this subspecies (Table 1).

In the early 20th century, the range of Painted Bush-Quail was expanded to include parts of Jharkhand including Manbhum, Singbhaum, and Hazaribagh by E. C. Stuart Baker (Stuart Baker 1928:382). However, as is often the case with Baker's works, this inclusion did not have any definitive provenance. Hence, its presence in Jharkhand is not supported by any actual records till date though it could have occurred along the border regions. Ripley (1961:79) briefly stated its range as Madhya Pradesh and Odisha; the authority for listing Odisha is unknown. Some of these localities mentioned in Hume & Marshall (Hume & Marshall 1880:127) from Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh (including Chhattisgarh) were specifically called out by Ali & Ripley (1987:108) but they also included Bihar, Odisha, and West Bengal in its distribution without specifying any localities. Based on all these historical texts, the range maps of present-day field guides (Grimmett et al. 1998, 2011, 2026; Kazmierczak 2000; Rasmussen & Anderton 2005, 2012b) included both Odisha and West Bengal in its range. This has also resulted in the species being reported casually in checklists from Odisha (Ramakrishna et al. 2006; Lahkar et al. 2015; Giri et al. 2020). However, a thorough analysis indicated that there is no credible evidence of its occurrence from West Bengal (Manna et al. 2024). Similarly, we find a total lack of credible evidence of its occurrence from most parts of Odisha.

However, by analyzing the historical place names and their extent, we believe that there is credible evidence of it having occurred in the extreme eastern parts of the state. There are ten specimens of this subspecies in the Dublin Museum, all of them contributed by Valentine Ball. In that series, four of the skins are from a locality listed as 'Karial, Raipur, India', taken in 1877 (Sigwart et al. 2004:17). This is a locality from where Ball collected extensively including his famous Forest Owlet *Athene blewitti* specimen, which is also in the same museum. The reference to 'Mr. Ball also got it in Bastar states, in Nawagarh and Kurial' (Hume & Marshall 1880:129) certainly refers to Ball's own writings, where it is spelt as Karial (Ball 1878:195 & 225). Ball explicitly stated that both Nawagarh and Karial were two native states subordinate to Raipur, and that he had collected specimens there in 1876–77. This might be the reason why the Dublin Museum catalogue lists them as from 'Karial, Raipur'. However, Karial can be traced to present-day Khariar in western Odisha (see map at <https://rajputs.net/view/khariar>), once a princely state that still has forests in its western parts. These forests entirely fall within present-day Odisha. As shown in the online map, Nawagarh is clearly outside present-day Odisha, and refers to Bindranawagarh in Gariaband district, of the Bastar region in Chhattisgarh. There are many other localities with name 'Nawagarh' in this part of India but I am certain that it does not refer to any other, and it is not inside Odisha.

In 1949, Walter Koelz and Rupchand Thakur visited localities south-east of Raipur in Chhattisgarh and secured several specimens (Table 1). The two sites from which specimens came are Barnawapara (a wildlife sanctuary in present-day Chhattisgarh) and from 'Nawapara'. There are several localities by the latter name in this region, but I believe that, owing to its proximity to Raipur, this refers to Nuapada [=Nawapara] district in present-day Odisha, where Khariar is also situated. Koelz and Rupchand may have been following the records of Ball in search of the Forest Owlet.

Blewitt's reference to Sambalpur is interesting as he specifically indicated that it is sparsely found only in the south-western parts of Sambalpur district and having not obtained from the 'other half' (Hume & Marshall 1880:129). The present-day Sambalpur district is fully in Odisha but it had undergone splitting from an erstwhile larger Sambalpur district that once shared its western border with Chhattisgarh. It is unclear how Blewitt might have split the historical district into two halves; however, Mahanadi River is traditionally believed to have been geographical divide between the north and south portions (see Ball 1878:194). The southern portions now fall within the Bargarh District of Odisha. However, the traditional boundary between Raipur and Sambalpur is the Sindhoda Ghat, which is on the Chhattisgarh side (Hakimuddin Saify, pers. comm. 20 October 2026). Hence, it is not clear from Blewitt's writings whether his Sambalpur records are from present-day Odisha or Chhattisgarh.

Ethnozoological research in the Koraput region of southern Odisha recorded medicinal usages for the meat of Painted Bush-Quails apart from other quails (Sabat et al. 2025). This might indirectly indicate the presence of this species in the Koraput region. This is not unexpected as the Koraput region lies between the known localities in Bastar (Chhattisgarh), southern Odisha (Mahendragiri hills) and north-eastern Andhra Pradesh (Lammasingi).

Table 1. Summary of historical and recent sites of Central Indian Painted Bush-Quail in central and eastern India

Sl. No	Date/period	Locality	State	Evidence	Reference	Remarks
1	April 1864	Balaghat	Madhya Pradesh	Specimens	Hume (1874:512); Hume & Marshall (1880:127)	At least one specimen by R. Thompson in NHMUK. Probably more existed, as mentioned by Hume. See also sl. no. 19.
2	1866–67	Sironcha or Godavari Valley	Maharashtra (and perhaps Telangana also)	Specimen(s)	Blanford (1867:464) Blanford (1869:190);	No specimen was located. Blanford shot at least one specimen in the 'high jungle between Chanda and Sironcha'. Ball mentioned Blanford collecting it from 'Udipur country'

					Ball (1874:428); Hume & Marshall (1880:127)	(untraced) of Sironcha. Thompson reported it from both Sironcha and Godavari Valley.
3	06 May 1870	Jashpur Nagar, West Chota Nagpur	Chhattisgarh	Specimen		Specimen collected by Blanford with label as 'Jashpur' in NHMUK.
4	1871–1877	Raipur	Chhattisgarh	Specimens	Hume (1874:512); Ball (1878:225); Hume & Marshall (1880:127)	Includes the syntype NHMUK#1889.5.10.720 apart from several more specimens sent by Blewitt. Hume had at least 20 specimens while he described the subspecies and 13, including the type, are in NHMUK. Most were shot earlier than 1874 as Hume says "I have for years hesitated to describe this race, notwithstanding its persistent if small differences; what has now turned the scale is, that Mr. Davison, who has shot and trapped hundreds of the Nilghiri bird"
5	1872	Surguja or Chota Nagpur	Chhattisgarh	Specimens	Ball (1874:428); Ball (1878:225); Hume & Marshall (1880:127)	One specimen with label as 'Sugusa' in Dublin Museum likely from here as Ball did mention he shot one in 'Western Chota Nagpur–Surguja'. Another Biddulph specimen, with 'Chota, Lagporus' as verbatim locality, is also held in NHMUK. Both have same year of collection.
6	Pre-1874	Bhandara	Maharashtra	Specimen?	Hume (1874:512); Hume & Marshall (1880:127)	Though no specimen was located, the locality is mentioned by Blewitt.
7	Pre-1874	Chandrapur	Maharashtra	Specimen(s)	Ball (1874:428); Hume & Marshall (1880:127)	No specimen located. Ball mentioned Blanford collecting from Chanda [=Chandrapur]. Thompson reported it as very abundant in southern and eastern portions of the district.
8	1874	Satpuras or Pachmarhi hills	Madhya Pradesh	Specimens	Ball (1874:428); Hume & Marshall (1880:127); Maheswaran et al. (2022)	Two specimens labeled 'Satpura' in National Museum of Ireland [=Dublin Museum] and one in Zoological Survey of India, Kolkata. These could be from 'Denwa Valley below Pachmarhi hills' as mentioned in Hume & Marshall (1880:127). In late 19 th century, presumably Satpura hills might invariably refer to Pachmarhi.
9	1874	Seoni	Madhya Pradesh	Specimens	Hume & Marshall (1880:127)	At least eight specimens in NHMUK.
10	1877	Khariar [=Kurial or Karial], Nuapada district	Odisha	Specimens	Ball (1878:225); Hume & Marshall (1880:127); Sigwart et al. (2004:17)	Four skins and one skeleton in Dublin Museum bear the locality label 'Karial, Raipur, India'. Ball specifically stated he obtained specimens from 'Karial'. See discussion in the text.
11	Pre-1880	Mandla	Madhya Pradesh	Specimen?	Hume & Marshall (1880:127)	No specimen was located, but the locality was mentioned by Hume.
12	Pre-1880	Southern Narsinghpur	Madhya Pradesh	Specimen?	Hume & Marshall (1880:127)	No specimen was located, but Hume specifically mentioned the southern part of Narsinghpur district.
13	Pre-1880	Delakhari	Madhya Pradesh	Specimen?	Hume & Marshall (1880:127)	No specimen was located but Hume specifically mentioned Sal forests of Delakhari.
14	Pre-1880	Bailadila (Bastar)	Chhattisgarh	Specimen?	Hume & Marshall (1880:127)	No specimen was located. Thompson stated its range extended onto 'Bela-Dila plateau, which has an elevation of 3,600 feet [= c. 1,000 m]'. No specimen was located in Dublin Museum or elsewhere. But Ball specifically stated that he obtained specimen(s) from 'Nawagarh'. See discussion in the text.
15	Pre-1880	Bindranawagarh [=Nawagarh] (Bastar)	Chhattisgarh	Specimen(s)	Ball (1878:225); Hume & Marshall (1880:127)	
16	Pre-1880	Sambalpur	Chhattisgarh or Odisha	Specimen?	Hume & Marshall (1880:127)	Hume quotes Blewitt, who specifically mentions south-western portions of Sambalpur where it was found. See discussion in the text.
17	March 1949	Nuapada [= Nawapara]	Odisha	Specimens		Six specimens by Walter Koelz and Rupchand Thakur in FMNH and UMMZ. See discussion in the text.
18	March 1949	Barnawapara	Chhattisgarh	Specimens		Three specimens by Walter Koelz in FMNH.
19	07 March 1959	Supkhar (Balaghat)	Madhya Pradesh	Specimen		One specimen collected by Humayun Abdulali in Los Angeles Museum. Supkhar presently is inside the core zone of Kanha Tiger Reserve.

20	25 January 1977	Lammasingi [=Lambasingi], Visakhapatnam District	Andhra Pradesh	Two adults and four juveniles captured; species described as resident	Price (1980:408)	This is the most recent specimen collected that is now held in a museum. Eastern Ghats occurrence; subspecies not specified, but certainly <i>blewitti</i> . Perhaps the last authentic record of the taxon before this report.
21	August 2026	Mahendragiri Hills	Odisha	Photographs	This work	A pair was reported on 13 and 15 August 2026.

Hence, this record is significant as the first documented occurrence of the Central Indian Painted Bush-Quail in almost five decades. The record also supports the need to reassess the poorly documented eastern distribution of the taxon, as highlighted by recent works (Praveen 2025). Using the historical locations, I have plotted its historical range (Fig. 1) and assuming the bird might still be rediscovered in poorly surveyed areas, its total range is about 217,000 sq. km with a minimum convex polygon of c.300,000 sq. km; used for the Extent of Occurrence (EOO) as per the IUCN.

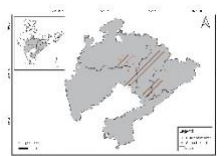


Fig. 1. Geographical distribution of the Central Indian Painted Bush-Quail in central and eastern India, showing historical records and the current record. The hatched area represents the approximate inferred distribution range based on available distributional information.

While the species should be searched in Mahendragiri and adjoining Eastern Ghats, it must be actively searched in its former stronghold in Chhattisgarh and eastern Madhya Pradesh. This region still has several well-staffed protected areas like the Tiger Reserves of Achanakmar, Indravati, Kanha, Nawegaon-Nagzira, Pench (in Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh), Satpura, Tadoba-Andheri, and Udanti-Sitanadi. Ideal grassy expanses and scrub patches in these tiger reserves should be actively searched for this species. The forest departments of the respective states should circulate photographs and audio recordings and encourage ground staff to report its presence. The same can be extended to other protected areas like Badalkhol, Barnawapara, Bhairamgarh, Bhamragarh, Boramdev, Chaprala, Ghodazari, Gomarda, Kanger Ghati, Koka, Pamed, and Umred-Pauni-Karhandla.

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