

Whispering Wings®

Newsletter of the Chandigarh Bird Club®

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Front Cover - Indian Pitta (*Pitta brachyura*) by Lalit Mohan Bansal

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Rima Dhillon



Greetings to my fellow Birders,

Whispering Wings is celebrating the completion of eleven wonderful years. At the outset, I would like to congratulate and thank the entire editorial team and our regular contributors, without whom it would not have been possible to sustain this venture for so long. A Newsletter is only as interesting as the people who write for it, and I hope all our members will continue to send in their articles, trip reports and photographs so that Whispering Wings remains a vibrant reflection of our shared passion for birds and nature.

Over the past few months, India's grasslands have found themselves in the national spotlight. In Maharashtra, a proposal to afforest the Nannaj–Solapur grasslands, an important habitat of the Critically Endangered Great Indian Bustard, has generated widespread concern among conservationists. At the same time, Banni Grassland in Gujarat, India's largest tropical grassland, has been earmarked for a large solar farm and other renewable energy projects after being viewed as an extensive expanse of degraded land.

Since the days of the British Raj, grasslands in India have been officially and informally classified as "wastelands", and unfortunately this narrative has persisted for nearly eight decades after Independence. In reality, grasslands are among our richest ecosystems, supporting an extraordinary web of life that has evolved over millennia. They provide habitat for a remarkable diversity of birds, mammals, reptiles, insects and countless other organisms, including vital pollinators that keep ecosystems functioning. Yet development proposals continue to treat these landscapes as vacant spaces, making

them frequent targets for afforestation, agriculture, urban expansion, industrial development and infrastructure projects.

A glimmer of hope has emerged from the Maharashtra government's **Green Maharashtra Policy 2026**. In a landmark shift, it recognises that natural grasslands are neither wastelands nor degraded lands awaiting tree planting, but are unique ecosystems that deserve protection and restoration in their own right. One hopes that this enlightened approach will influence conservation policies across the country, for the future of India's grasslands, and perhaps even its wetlands may well depend on such informed decisions.

Closer to home, the remarkable saga of the hornbills nesting in Delhi's Lodhi Garden has captivated the birding community over the past several weeks. Daily updates from patient observers have not only documented an extraordinary behavioural story but have also reminded us of the true essence of birdwatching: spending time in the field, observing carefully, and allowing nature to reveal its stories at its own pace.

Happy reading, and Happy Birding!



Indian Golden Oriole (*Oriolus kundoo*)
by Sarbjeet Kaur

SECRETARY'S REPORT

Amandeep Singh Channa



The second quarter of the year has been a tremendous one for Chandigarh Bird Club. It saw the arrival of the Indian Pitta and White-rumped Shama in the ISCR. On the technological front, CBC's app is under development.

In April, the club's field trip to Chakki Mor saw an overwhelming twenty birders joining in, with marvellous sightings of Indian Paradise Flycatchers, Long-tailed Minivets, Golden Orioles and Blue-throated Barbets, among others. April also saw ISCR welcoming its summer visitors.

In May, birders from the club visited Thapli to see the Indian Pitta, and were not disappointed. Thapli is one of the spots for the Pitta in the region. CBC members also addressed the Army School in Chandimandir.



In June, birders visited Morni Hills, and were delighted by the sightings of red-headed vulture and Eurasian Hobby, and on another occasion, of the White-rumped Shama. During the monthly meetings, the CBC's upcoming app was discussed and the club's annual expenditure was reviewed.

A DIFFERENT PROSPECTIVE

10 - Year Old Chetesh Wangnue

Subhash Sapru

Birdwatching is rightly considered a fantastic way for children to connect with nature, learn about wildlife, and develop a sense of curiosity. A visit to Chandigarh by my 10-year old grandson, Master Chetesh Wangnue (a student of Delhi Public School, Noida) during his summer vacation in June 2026, proved to be a turning point for him. After getting a few lessons from me on the basics of photography during his vacation a couple of years ago, he had tried his hand with a Nikon mirrorless camera to make images at different locations within Chandigarh and at some other places visited by him. Interestingly, when he began to accompany me to Sukhna Lake for birdwatching and bird photography, his joy knew no bounds. A glimpse of some species of birds at the regulator-end of the lake turned out to be a turning point for him as he began to accompany me to the lake every morning, not to give me company for my morning walk, but so that he could make images of birds. To me it appeared as if his excitement and fascination for birds knew no bounds. Capturing birds with the camera, and exploring his own growing potential was part of his daily routine for the duration of his visit to Chandigarh this summer.



Black-winged Stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*)

Considering the weight and size of a Nikon Z50 II camera and a Nikon Z 180-600 f/5.6-6.3 lens, use of a tripod made things easier for him. Though he is not familiar with the names of most of the species yet, differences in their size, shapes and colours tempted him to make their images with equal enthusiasm and curiosity, and later ask me to identify them for him.

Interestingly, in less than a week he was able to capture about 15 different species at the regulator-end of the lake. These species included Black-winged Stilt, Whistling Duck, Indian Spot-billed Duck, Great Egret, Cattle Egret, Indian Peafowl, Red-wattled

Lapwing, Indian Pied Starling (Pied Myna), Common Moorhen, Knob-billed Duck, Grey-headed Swamphen, Indian Pond Heron, Purple Heron, and White-breasted Waterhen.



Great Egret (*Ardea alba*)

Earlier this year the first ever entry that he had submitted to the 14th Greek Photographic Circuit was accepted, and it enabled him to make a mark in the international circle of photography. His growing interest in the wonders of nature, at this tender age is a compelling factor in establishing a strong bond and understanding of the fragility of avians.



Grey-headed Swamphen (*Porphyrio poliocephalus*)



Grey-headed Swampheaven (*Porphyrio poliocephalus*)



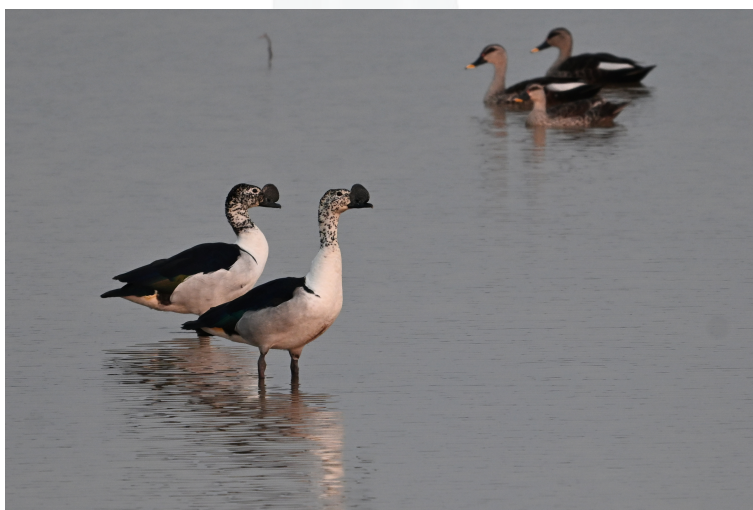
Indian Pied Starling (*Gracupica contra*)



Indian Pond Heron (*Ardeola grayii*)



Red-wattled Lapwing (*Vanellus indicus*)



**Front: Knob-billed Duck (*Sarkidiornis melanotos*)
Back: Indian Spot-billed Duck (*Anas poecilorhyncha*)**



Purple Heron (*Ardea purpurea*)



Red-wattled Lapwing (*Vanellus indicus*)



Lesser Whistling-duck (*Dendrocygna javanica*)



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greek.photographic.circuit 2026

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Eleftheria Konsolaki

SALON SECRETARY
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ASIAN EMERALD DOVE - GHUGHUTI

Mitinderpal Singh Sekhon

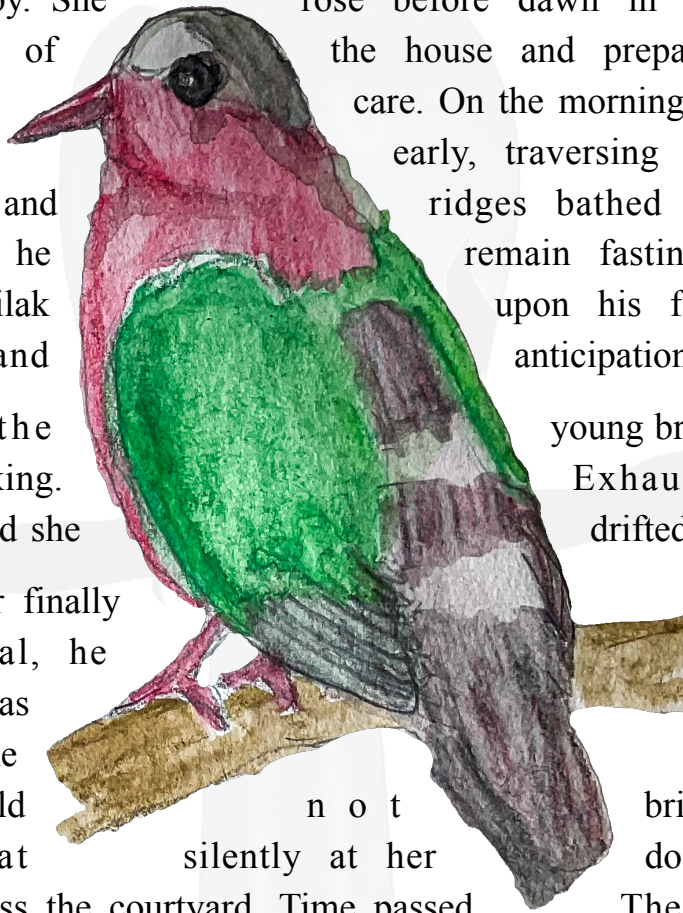
Kumoni folklore tells of a young bride who was married into a distant village nestled deep in the mountains of Kumaon. Her in-laws were gentle and loving, and her new home was kind to her. Yet, beneath the warmth of her surroundings, her heart ached for her childhood home — for her parents' embrace and the easy laughter she once shared with her brother. Marriage had bound her to new duties, and visits to her parental home grew rare.

A few months after her wedding came the festival of Bhai Dooj, a day that celebrates the sacred bond between brother and sister. At the thought of seeing her brother, her heart brimmed with joy. She rose before dawn in eager anticipation, cleaning every corner of the house and preparing his favourite dishes with loving care. On the morning of the festival, her brother too set out early, traversing winding mountain paths, crossing valleys and ridges bathed in pale sunlight. Tradition required that he remain fasting until his sister placed the ceremonial tilak upon his forehead. Sustained only by affection and anticipation, he walked on.

By afternoon, the young bride had finished her chores and cooking. Exhaustion, quiet and deep, overcame her, and she drifted into sleep.

When her brother finally arrived at his sister's sasural, he paused at the threshold. There she was — asleep, her face still marked by the day's labor. His heart softened. He could not bring himself to wake her. Instead, he sat silently at her doorstep, watching the shadows lengthen across the courtyard. Time passed. The mountain winds grew cooler. Knowing he must return before darkness fell — when wild creatures roamed the forested paths — he quietly placed the gifts he had carried with such effort beside her. Among them was the beloved sweet, Bal Mithai. Then, without disturbing her rest, he began his journey home.

When the young woman awoke, dusk had begun to settle. Her eyes fell upon the gifts, and in an instant she understood. Her brother had come. He had waited. And he had left. Grief seized her. She wept uncontrollably, her voice echoing through the stone walls.



“My brother walked all this way for me,” she cried. “He must have been weary and hungry. He returned empty-stomached while I slept. What kind of sister am I?” So profound was her remorse, so piercing her sorrow, that legend says her heart could not bear it. Overwhelmed by anguish, she fell down and died!

The mountains remember her still. It is said she was reborn as the *ghughuti* (*Asian Emerald Dove*) and when it calls across the valleys of Kumaon, its mournful song carries her eternal lament:

“*Ghughuti basuti, bhaio bhuko goyo main sooti...*”
(Oh father’s dove, My brother went back hungry while I slept.)

(Narrated to me by an elderly man in a dhaba at Gunji, near Lipulekh Pass, Uttarakhand.)



White-rumped Shama (*Copsychus malabaricus*)
by Sarbjeet Kaur

THE SEASON BETWEEN TWO CUCKOOS

Lalit Mohan Bansal



Left: Common Hawk Cuckoo (*Hierococcyx varius*) Right: Pied Cuckoo (*Clamator jacobinus*)

From the call of the Common Hawk-Cuckoo (*Hierococcyx varius*) to the arrival of the Jacobin Cuckoo, aka Pied Cuckoo (*Clamator jacobinus*) summer unfolds as a season of nesting, transformation, and endless birding delight.



Black-rumped Flameback (*Dinopium benghalense*)

For many people, summer is a season to endure. The relentless heat, shimmering horizons, and long afternoons often make us yearn for the arrival of the monsoon. For birders, however, summer is one of the most rewarding times of the year: a season that unfolds like a grand natural drama filled with courtship, nest building, migration, parental care, and remarkable behavioural spectacles.



Common Hawk Cuckoo (*Hierococcyx varius*)

The season often begins with a familiar call. As temperatures rise, the repetitive and increasingly urgent call of the Common Hawk-Cuckoo, commonly known as the "Brain-fever Bird," echoes through groves, gardens, and wooded patches. To many birders, its call is more than just a sound; it is the announcement of a new season in the avian world.



Indian Pitta (*Pitta brachyura*) busy collecting nesting material

With summer comes the breeding season, and suddenly the landscape is alive with activity. Birds that may have seemed quiet and inconspicuous during the winter, become busy with the business of raising the next generation.

Among the most fascinating breeding stories is that of the hornbills. The female seals herself inside a tree cavity, leaving only a narrow slit open. For weeks, she remains confined within this natural chamber while the male tirelessly supplies food. The trust and cooperation between the pair offer one of the most extraordinary examples of parental care in the bird world.



Oriental Pied Hornbill (*Anthracoceros albirostris*) with mud pellets for sealing a tree cavity



State Bird of Chandigarh Indian Grey Hornbill (*Ocyrceros birostris*) perched beside a tree cavity with a berry for the females

Summer is also the season of master architects. Baya Weavers (*Ploceus philippinus*) transform blades of grass into intricately woven hanging nests that have fascinated naturalists for centuries. Males often construct several nests, each a masterpiece of engineering, hoping to attract a discerning female.



Baya Weaver (*Ploceus philippinus*) colony



Baya Weaver (*Ploceus philippinus*)

One can spend hours watching these industrious birds weaving, repairing, and displaying their craftsmanship. For birders, a colony of Baya Weavers in full breeding activity is among the most captivating sights of the season.



White-browed Scimitar-babbler (*Pomatorhinus schisticeps*)

Summer also paints the landscape with brilliant shades of red when the Indian Coral Tree (*Erythrina variegata*) bursts into bloom. Almost devoid of leaves, the tree becomes covered with clusters of scarlet flowers that act like magnets for birds. Sunbirds, bulbuls, mynas, orioles, parakeets, flowerpeckers, and even barbets can often be seen visiting the blossoms to feed on their nectar.

For birders and photographers, a flowering Coral Tree becomes a natural stage where birds arrive one after another, offering endless opportunities to observe interactions and capture striking images against a backdrop of vibrant red flowers. Few sights capture the essence of summer birding as beautifully as a Coral Tree alive with avian activity.

Summer also brings movement, colour, and anticipation. The forests and groves seem to acquire a fresh vibrancy as some of the season's most beautiful birds make their

presence known. The brilliant Indian Golden Oriole (*Oriolus kundoo*) glowing like a splash of sunlight among the green canopy, becomes easier to locate with its melodious calls and striking yellow plumage.



Indian Golden Oriole (*Oriolus kundoo*)



Indian Paradise-Flycatcher (*Terpsiphone paradisi*)

Equally captivating is the Indian Paradise Flycatcher (*Terpsiphone paradisi*). Watching a male in breeding plumage, with its flowing white tail streamers dancing through shafts of sunlight, is an experience that remains etched in a birder's memory long after the sighting.

One of the most eagerly awaited arrivals of the season is the Indian Pitta (*Pitta brachyura*). Dressed in a spectacular combination of greens, blues, yellows, and chestnut, this jewel-like migrant appears in many parts of India during the breeding season. Its distinctive whistle and brilliant colours make every sighting memorable. For many birders, the first calls of the Indian Pitta, the golden flash of an oriole in the canopy, and the graceful flight of an Indian Paradise Flycatcher are among the defining moments of summer birding.



Indian Pitta (*Pitta brachyura*)

Wetlands too acquire a special charm during summer. Among their seasonal stars is the Pheasant-tailed Jacana (*Hydrophasianus chirurgus*), a bird that undergoes one of the most remarkable transformations of the breeding season. Adorned with a rich golden nape and spectacular elongated tail feathers, it appears to glide effortlessly across floating vegetation like a jewel of the marshes. For many birders, encountering a Pheasant-tailed Jacana in full breeding plumage is one of the most striking visual experiences of the season. Its transformation serves as a reminder that summer is not merely a period of nesting activity but also a season when birds display their most magnificent colours and forms.



Pheasant-tailed Jacana (*Hydrophasianus chirurgus*)

Yet some of the most rewarding summer observations take place much closer to home. As temperatures soar, earthen pots and water bowls placed in gardens, balconies, and courtyards become gathering points for birds seeking relief from the heat. House Sparrows, bulbuls, mynas, robins, doves, and many others arrive to drink and bathe. Watching birds splash enthusiastically in cool water on a hot afternoon offers a delightful reminder that simple conservation actions can create meaningful connections between people and wildlife.



Indian White-eye (*Zosterops palpebrosus*)



Jungle Babbler (*Turdiodes striata*)

These small acts also remind us of our responsibility toward the wildlife that shares our surroundings. Providing clean water during periods of extreme heat can make a significant difference to urban and rural bird populations. In return, birders are rewarded with intimate encounters and opportunities to observe behaviour that is rarely seen otherwise.



Red-wattled Lapwing (*Vanellus indicus*)

Summer is also a season of learning. Fledglings take their first uncertain flights, adults tirelessly ferry food to hungry chicks, alarm calls reveal hidden predators, and territorial disputes play out across the landscape. Every outing presents opportunities to observe behaviour that remain hidden during much of the year.



Indian Paradise-Flycatcher (*Terpsiphone paradisi*)

As summer slowly surrenders to the approaching rains, another familiar visitor arrives: the Jacobin Cuckoo. For generations, its appearance has been associated with the onset of the monsoon. Its arrival signals that the long, hot season is nearing its end and that another transformation of the landscape is about to begin.

Thus, the summer birding calendar forms a complete story. It begins with the insistent calls of the Common Hawk-Cuckoo, unfolds through courtship, nest building, brood parasitism, migration, parental care, and spectacular breeding plumages, and concludes with the arrival of the Jacobin Cuckoo, the harbinger of rain.



Pied Cuckoo (*Clamator jacobinus*)

While many birders eagerly await the winter migrants, summer deserves equal admiration. It is the season when birds reveal some of their most intimate and fascinating secrets. From the dazzling colours of the Indian Golden Oriole and Indian

Pitta to the elegance of the Indian Paradise Flycatcher, from the architectural genius of the Baya Weaver to the transformed beauty of the Pheasant-tailed Jacana, every corner of the landscape tells a story. For those willing to brave the heat, summer offers not merely bird sightings, but stories of survival, adaptation, dedication, and renewal.

When the call of the Common Hawk-Cuckoo rings out across the countryside, listen carefully. It is announcing the beginning of one of the most rewarding seasons a birder can experience. And by the time the Jacobin Cuckoo arrives with the promise of rain, another unforgettable chapter in the lives of birds will have been written.



Indian Grey Hornbill (*Ocyrceros birostris*)
by Sarbjeet Kaur

HIMALAYAN SNOWCOCK

Narbir Kahlon

We had visited the Spiti Valley in March 2026 with the intention of experiencing Spiti in winter. Night time temperatures were still touching -17° C. It was all about experiences and the desire to understand this high-altitude trans Himalayan region. While we were still in our acclimatisation phase based out of Kaza, we got a call and were lucky to get a view of the Snow Leopard. The sighting albeit from a little far out across a gorge, did not take away from the majesty of the feline that rules these altitudes. The sighting is etched in our mind and shall always remain as a cherished experience.

Wildlife braves the harsh winter of this trans Himalayan region and seeing Chukar walking over ice in search of grass seeds, a Red Fox sleeping on a windswept rock soaking in the sharp sun, a Wooly Hare sheltering in a cavity as snowflakes drifted past it, Ibex males resting on a cliff edge soaking in the sun, a subadult quenching its thirst by eating ice, Blue Sheep digging to reach the dry grass buried under the white sheet of ice and snow that seemed to cover the entire landscape, were all part of this experience.



Himalayan Snowcock (*Tetraogallus himalayensis*)

On the 7th day of our trip, wrapped in five layers of winter gear, Navjit and I set out under the gaze of the stars in the wee hours of the morning from Kibber with our wildlife guide, the experienced Lamaji in search of another ghost inhabiting the spartan landscape of Spiti. We were out looking for the ‘Koon’ the local name for the Himalayan Snowcock (*Tetraogallus himalayensis*). It was on our Spiti target list, specially because the village of Komic is named after it ‘ko ‘meaning Snowcock and ‘mic ‘meaning eye (i.e. ko-mic, ‘The Eye of The Snowcock’).

To see the Snowcock, Komic was however not our destination, and we headed to Langza instead, where under the watchful eyes of the Budha statue the Snowcocks are known to present themselves at dawn. At the onset of spring, they tend to call early in the morning at sunrise. Their whistles ring out, shattering the silence hanging over the frozen landscape. We came across a couple of birds beside the road leading up towards Langza in the pre-dawn twilight. They caught us unprepared and before we knew it they had disappeared into a depression. They move surprisingly fast for birds of their size (55 to 74 cm).

The sun rises fast here, and after a couple of bends in the road, we could see the silhouette of small groups of Snowcock moving up the ridge line in the distance. Lamaji wanted to know if we were up to the task of trying to track them down. Not one to give up, I decided to haul my considerable bulk up, braving the rarified air at 1500 ft through the snow swept landscape to chase down these agile birds. Navjit, on the other hand decided to take his chances by driving ahead. I got out of breath pretty fast and had to hand over my camera to Lamaji. The ice kept giving way under my weight but the adrenalin in the kept me going. I got a couple of record images as the chase progressed.

We walked uphill for over a kilometre and ended up herding a pair right up to Navjit who was enjoying a hot cup of coffee in true 'Bada Sahib' style. The birds popped up near him and he got a close-up shot of the Snowcock. Startled, the birds exploded downhill in classic escape protocol. While I did get an image as they shot past me, Navjit had to bear the brunt of a burst of expletives, as all the hard work resulted in seeing one's quarry flying off is not funny; specially since he, in his excitement at having a close encounter with the birds, managed a not too perfect close-up image.

The Snowcock has a special place in folklore and is a symbol of resilience and an inspiration to those who dare to dwell between the lands of the humans (below the tree line) and the Gods (who inhabit the highest peaks in the roof of the world in the Himalayas). Amongst the Buddhist population of Spiti, where the species comes to monasteries during the harsh winters and are fed by local monks, they are regarded as having the soul of young lamas who have died.

Folklore originates from the behaviour of these birds. They fly down each morning to the base of the mountain to drink water and then slowly walk up feeding on tubers and grass seeds. This daily trek up and down the hills at this altitude is truly inspirational and is the basis of stories which are used to teach young children perseverance and resilience. They have the uncanny ability to survive temperatures going down to below -30° C. Soft downy feathers and fur-lined feet are special adaptations which help them survive the harsh winters of Spiti. Their breeding season extends from April to June, when they tend to be in pairs. For the rest of the year they are found in larger groups, with some as sentries, posted to keep a look out while the rest of the flock feeds. Golden

Eagles, Snow Leopards, and Himalayan Wolves are their main predators. In case they perceive danger, the sentries let out the distinctive three-note whistle, and the birds fly downhill to restart their foraging routine. Their whistles have been known to warn herders of impending danger.

The Snowcocks somehow seems to know when bad weather approaches, and they fly down to lower elevations. This observation has helped local communities in predicting weather patterns for centuries.

The Himalayan Snowcocks range extends from the Central and Western Himalayas to the Pamir Mountains and parts of Western China. A small population was released in 1963 and has since established itself in the Ruby Mountains and the East Humboldt Range in North-eastern Nevada in the U.S.

Himalayan Snowcocks go by various names; in Kashmir: Gurka-kao, in Ladakh: Ribya or Ribja. The Hindi name is Ram-chakor, Garhwali and Kumaoni name: Golab and Ryam. In Nepal it is Himali Hiunkukhura, in Bhutan: Gongmo- referred to as “pangi lhabja gongmo” (heavenly bird of the alpine meadows). In the Pamir mountains it is referred to as Ulas.

The Himalayan Snowcock looks like an overgrown Chukar Partridge. The white throat and sides of the head are bordered by chestnut moustachial stripe and a dark, broad chestnut band stretching from the eye over the ear, expanding into the collar. The upper parts are grey, with feathers of the rump and the wings, bordered with rufous. The upper breast is grey with dark crescent bars. The lower breast plumage is dark grey, and the sides of the body are streaked with black, chestnut and white. The under-tail coverts are white. The legs and orbital skin are yellow. Sexes are alike in plumage, but the female is smaller and lacks the large tarsal spur of the male. In flight, from above, the white primaries tipped in black and the rufous outer tail feathers make it distinctive.

It blends in so well with the landscape it inhabits, but for its call or movement it would be nearly impossible to spot. After all the excitement died down and sanity returned, we realised how lucky we were to have had a good sighting of this, the Holy Grail of high-altitude game birds.

MOUNT VICTORIA BABAX - MIZORAM'S GIFT TO BIRDERS

A Mizoram Birding Trip Report

Bhupesh Kumar Goyal

When Andrew Spencer and Pooja Sharma first documented this striking babbler at Far Pak, Mizoram, in January 2022, it sent ripples of excitement through the Indian birding community. Almost overnight Mizoram, a state that had previously drawn only a handful of devoted birders, lured by the enigmatic Chin Hills Wren Babbler, found itself firmly on the birding map. The prospect of the Babax, alongside other prized targets such as the Spot-breasted Laughingthrush, Stripe-throated Woodpecker, Hume's Treecreeper and, the legendary Chin Hills Wren Babbler, was impossible to resist.

When Arka Sarkar announced his Mizoram itinerary beginning 29 March 2026, I signed up without hesitation. I booked my flight from Delhi to Lengpui Airport early, and then spent weeks waiting, not always patiently for the day we would finally go chasing Mizoram's avian treasures.



Mount Victoria Babax (*Pterorrhinus woodi*)

Arrival and the First Surprise

The group assembled at Lengpui Airport, about 30 kilometres from Aizawl, and we made our way to the state-run Hmuiphang Tourist Guest House, a charming spot with comfortable cottages nestled in a beautiful setting. Mizoram as yet has no private guest houses or homestays, so the state tourist lodges become one's home away from home.

Birding began in earnest the very next morning as we set off towards Sailam and Serchhip. Our local guide and organiser, Joe Thanga stopped the vehicle at a



Brown Bush Warbler (*Locustella luteoventris*)

seemingly unremarkable bend in the road. Within moments, the Spot-breasted Laughingthrush materialised from the undergrowth, a bird that is notoriously difficult to coax into view. Dull brown in plumage, it sang a song of extraordinary beauty. I had once



Red-faced Liocichla (*Liocichla phoenicea*)

read that it makes up in voice what it lacks in looks, and standing there in the Mizo morning air, I understood exactly what that meant.

The drive towards Sangau was a birding feast: Rufescent Prinias, Rufous-capped Babblers, Pin-striped Tit Babblers, a Lesser Cuckoo calling somewhere in the canopy, a Blyth's Paradise Flycatcher with its trailing long ribbon, and a Square-tailed Drongo surveying its domain from a bare perch. Yet all the while, our minds were already climbing towards Far Pak.

The Road to Far Pak



Forest Guesthouse at Far Pak

After an overnight halt at Sangau, we drove to Thaltlang, where a sturdy 4x4 Yodha vehicle awaited to carry us up the steep, slippery climb to Far Pak, perched between 1,600 and 1,700 metres. Even this capable vehicle eventually surrendered to the terrain about half a kilometre short of the summit. We completed the ascent on foot, cameras and binoculars in hand, breathing in the cool, pine-scented mountain air.

It was around seven in the morning, prime time when Arka suggested we try our luck right where we stood, even before reaching the monument that traditionally marks the best Babax territory. Joe looked around. Arka trained his ears for the Babax call. and after a few minutes, both Joe and Arka erupted, “The Babax is calling!”



Kitchen-cum-Dining Hall at Far Pak

We peered down over the edge of the precipice, and there they were. Two Mount Victoria Babaxes, perched on adjacent thorny bushes, calling in their hauntingly melodious voice, then slowly, almost theatrically, climbing towards us. As they reached eye level and regarded us with those extraordinary amber eyes, time seemed to stand still. The eyes of the Mount Victoria Babax are unlike those of almost any other bird - luminous, piercing, and utterly hypnotic. To see them at close quarters is to understand immediately why this bird has become the stuff of a legend amongst Indian birders.

Far Pak: A World Apart

From the monument, Far Pak unfolded in all its wild grandeur - a sweeping landscape of tall brown grassland interspersed with pine trees on the rolling slopes, remote and largely undisturbed. This is the habitat of the Babax, a bird named after Mount Victoria, the highest peak of the Arakan Range in Myanmar, some 200 kilometres away, where it was first described. Separated from the Chinese Babax as a distinct species in 2006, it remains one of the most localised and sought-after birds in the Indian subcontinent.

The Forest Guest House at Far Pak became our base for two nights - basic but clean, with no electricity, which we had anticipated. We arrived loaded with charged batteries, power banks, and headlamps. A modest shack nearby served as kitchen and dining room, and Joe had provisioned it well: throughout our stay, we were kept fuelled with hot, hearty meals that arrived like magic at the end of long days in the field.



Brown-crowned Scimitar-Babbler (*Pomatorhinus phayrei*)

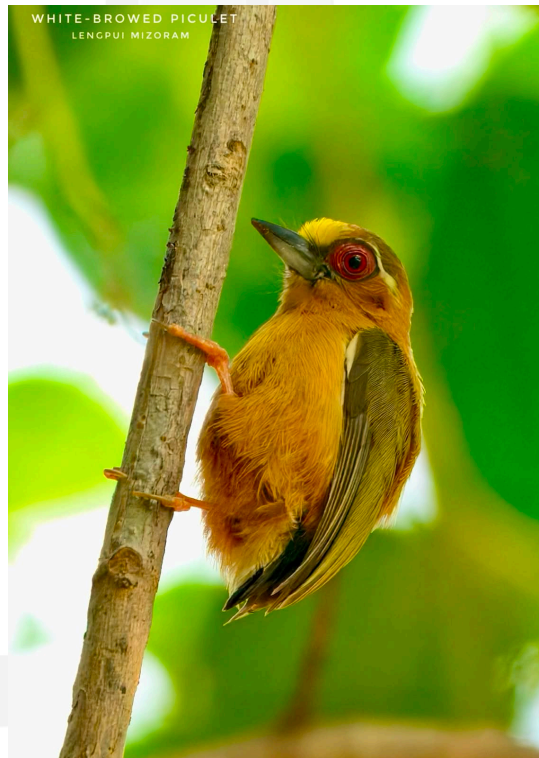
The birds came steadily. The Brown Bush Warbler announced itself with boisterous song and then, unusually cooperative, perched atop a small bush for all to see - a lifer for every member of the group. The Rufous-crowned Prinia played a maddening game of hide-and-seek before finally revealing itself partially for record shots. The Stripe-throated Woodpeckers, both male and female were relatively obliging, as was the Hume's Treecreeper, which we found with ease, and it photographed well.

The bathing hides created by the Forest Department proved to be extraordinary windows into the bird life of Far Pak. Over patient hours of watching, we were treated to a Mountain Bamboo Partridge pair, Striped and Blue-winged and Assam Laughingthrushes, Red-faced Liocichla, Streak-breasted, Brown-crowned and Slender-billed Scimitar Babblers, Golden Babbler, White-gorgeted Flycatcher, Slaty Blue Flycatcher, and Mountain Tailorbird - a roll call that would leave any naturalist breathless. One morning the call of the Spot-breasted Parrotbill drifted across from the

bamboo grove opposite the Guest House and we watched it scale the slender bamboo shoots with acrobatic ease. The Spot-breasted Scimitar Babbler, another uncommon find, also made an appearance.

The One That Made Us Wait

The Chin Hills Wren Babbler, Mizoram's signature bird and the one that started it all, kept us in suspense until the very end. It would call loudly from inside the bushes, but refused to step into the open. This is perhaps the most frustrating trait of the genus -to be so close, so audibly present, and yet so invisible.



White-browed Piculet (*Sasia ochracea*)

The revelation eventually happened on the trail to Phawngpui Peak, on our final morning at Far Pak. The Wren Babbler finally broke cover and did what wren babblers do when they decide to reveal themselves: darted energetically through the undergrowth, giving us breathtaking views that resolved into the photographs we had all dreamed of.

The Return

On the descent, we paused at the Tourist Lodge in Vanlaiphai beyond Sangau for a final night before the drive back to Lengpui. The birding around the Lengpui Tourist Lodge turned out to be a splendid finale to the entire trip: White-browed Piculet, Pale-chinned Flycatcher, Ruby-cheeked Sunbird, Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker, Green-billed Malkoha, and White-browed Scimitar Babbler all showed up in fine fettle, sending us home with cameras full and in high spirits.

Mizoram is a state that rewards patience, preparation, and a willingness to embrace the road less travelled. For anyone drawn to the wilder edges of the natural world, Far Pak and the Mount Victoria Babax offer an experience that is, quite simply unforgettable.



Spotted Nutcracker (*Nucifraga caryocatactes*)
by Sarbjeet Kaur

CBC FIELD TRIP: CHAKKI MOR, HIMACHAL PRADESH

19 April 2026: 0600 hrs to 1200 hrs

Birders:

1. Sarbjeet Kaur
2. Amandeep Singh
3. Rachna Mittal
4. Devinder Hanspal
5. Parveen Nain
6. Rima Dhillon
7. Jasbir S. Randhawa
8. Simrit Kaur
9. Sumeet Labana
10. Aprajita
11. Simmi
12. Rashi Jain
13. Alpana
14. Bonnie Hundal



April's field trip was taken to Chakki Mor for the summer visitors. Since the location is a common haunt for many birders, our group of fourteen, which began from Panchkula, swole to over twenty, when we reached Chakki Mor.

We stopped at the turning of the road into Chakki Mor, then we stopped at the bridge over the rivulet. It was disappointing to see that the rivulet has been encroached upon by a hotel which also built a swimming pool. The area, where we used to see Crested Kingfishers and Redstarts, is now devoid of them.

Our next stop was the temple, where we heard the White-crested Laughingthrushes. We moved to Sharma Dhaba next, which was a delight for everyone as it was there that we saw Blue-throated Barbets, Indian Paradise Flycatchers and Long-tailed Minivets. We had our tea and breakfast there.

Our final stop was Ishwar Dhaba, where we saw the Nuthatches along with the usual Laughingthrushes and other birds. Since the road onwards is still under construction after the landslide, we were unable to go all the way to Bhojnagar. We returned from there at about noon and birded along the way as well.

Checklist:

1. Kalij Pheasant - *Lophura leucomelanos*
2. Indian Peafowl - *Pavo cristatus*
3. Red Junglefowl - *Gallus gallus*
4. Rock Pigeon (Feral Pigeon) - *Columba livia* (Feral Pigeon)
5. Spotted Dove - *Spilopelia chinensis*
6. Asian Emerald Dove - *Chalcophaps indica*
7. Asian Koel - *Eudynamis scolopacea*
8. Common Hawk-Cuckoo - *Hierococcyx varius*
9. Indian Cuckoo - *Cuculus micropterus*
10. Oriental Honey-buzzard - *Pernis ptilorhynchus*
11. Indian Grey Hornbill - *Ocyroceros birostris*
12. Great Barbet - *Psilopogon virens*
13. Blue-throated Barbet - *Psilopogon asiaticus*
14. Brown-fronted Woodpecker - *Dendrocytes auriceps*
15. Grey-headed Woodpecker - *Picus canus*
16. Alexandrine Parakeet - *Psittacula eupatria*
17. Rose-ringed Parakeet - *Psittacula krameri*
18. Plum-headed Parakeet - *Psittacula cyanocephala*
19. Long-tailed Minivet - *Pericrocotus ethologus*
20. Indian Golden Oriole - *Oriolus kundoo*
21. White-throated Fantail - *Rhipidura albicollis*
22. Black Drongo - *Dicrurus macrocercus*
23. Ashy Drongo - *Dicrurus leucophaeus*
24. Hair-crested Drongo - *Dicrurus hottentottus*
25. Indian Paradise-Flycatcher - *Terpsiphone paradisi*
26. Red-billed Blue-Magpie - *Urocissa erythroryncha*
27. Rufous Treepie - *Dendrocitta vagabunda*
28. Grey Treepie - *Dendrocitta formosae*
29. Large-billed Crow - *Corvus macrorhynchos*
30. Cinereous Tit (Great Tit) - *Parus cinereus*

31. Himalayan Black-lored Tit - *Machlolophus xanthogenys*
32. Common Tailorbird - *Orthotomus sutorius*
33. Himalayan Prinia - *Prinia crinigera*
34. Grey-breasted Prinia - *Prinia hodgsonii*
35. Eastern Red-rumped Swallow - *Cecropis daurica*
36. Himalayan Black Bulbul - *Hypsipetes leucocephalus*
37. Red-vented Bulbul - *Pycnonotus cafer*
38. Himalayan Bulbul - *Pycnonotus leucogenys*
39. Hume's Warbler - *Phylloscopus humei*
40. Lemon-rumped Warbler - *Phylloscopus chloronotus*
41. Common Chiffchaff - *Phylloscopus collybita*
42. Western Crowned Warbler - *Phylloscopus occipitalis*
43. Grey-hooded Warbler - *Phylloscopus xanthoschistos*
44. Lesser Whitethroat - *Curruca curruca*
45. Indian White-eye - *Zosterops palpebrosus*
46. Black-chinned Babbler - *Cyanoderma pyrrhops*
47. Rusty-cheeked Scimitar-Babbler - *Erythrogonys erythrogenys*
48. Red-billed Leiothrix - *Leiothrix lutea*
49. Jungle Babbler - *Argya striata*
50. White-crested Laughingthrush - *Garrulax leucolophus*
51. Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch - *Sitta cinnamoventris*
52. Brahminy Starling - *Sturnia pagodarum*
53. Spot-winged Starling - *Saroglossa spilopterus*
54. Asian Brown Flycatcher - *Muscicapa dauurica*
55. Indian Robin - *Copsychus fulicatus*
56. Oriental Magpie-Robin - *Copsychus saularis*
57. Verditer Flycatcher - *Eumyias thalassinus*
58. Blue Whistling-Thrush - *Myophonus caeruleus*
59. Plumbeous Redstart - *Phoenicurus fuliginosus*
60. White-capped Redstart - *Phoenicurus leucocephalus*
61. Chestnut-bellied Rock-Thrush - *Monticola rufiventris*
62. Pied Bushchat - *Saxicola caprata*
63. Purple Sunbird - *Cinnyris asiaticus*
64. Crimson Sunbird - *Aethopyga siparaja*
65. House Sparrow - *Passer domesticus*
66. Russet Sparrow - *Passer cinnamomeus*
67. Yellow-throated Sparrow - *Gymnoris xanthocollis*
68. Grey Wagtail - *Motacilla cinerea*
69. Common Rosefinch - *Carpodacus erythrinus*
70. Crested Bunting - *Emberiza lathamii*

CBC FIELD TRIP: THAPLI, HARYANA

24 May 2026: 0600 hrs to 0930 hrs

Birders:

1. Rima Dhillon
2. Aprajita Lobana
3. Parvin Nain
4. Sarbjeet Kaur
5. Dr Mehak Tuli
6. Amit Tuli
7. Taara Tuli
8. Shilpi Sehgal
9. Sushil Chahlia
10. Saiyam Nagar
11. Deepinderjit Singh Kahlon



The location at Thapli village is adjacent to Thapli Nature Camp on the Panchkula Morni road. It is a birding hotspot as several bird species have chosen it over the last few years for nesting. From the last week of March to the end of August birders from Punjab, Haryana and Chandigarh flock here to observe the nesting birds.

Chandigarh Bird Club organises a field-trip in Thapli during the month of April or May every year to particularly monitor the arrival and nesting of Indian Pitta, Indian Paradise Flycatcher and Indian Golden Oriole.

As always the Indian Pitta was heard as it called continuously hoping to attract a mate. Answering calls could be heard too.

It is observed that though there is increase in the construction of houses in the village, the habitat has by and large remained intact over the last several years.



Indian Pitta (*Pitta brachyura*)



Indian Pitta (*Pitta brachyura*)

A small restaurant with a swimming pool has come up on the outskirts of the village but so far it has not seemed to disturb the natural habitat of the area.

Checklist:

1. Indian Peafowl - *Pavo cristatus*
2. Red Junglefowl - *Gallus gallus*
3. Feral Pigeon - *Columba livia*
4. Eurasian Collared-Dove - *Streptopelia decaocto*
5. Spotted Dove - *Spilopelia chinensis*
6. Laughing Dove - *Spilopelia senegalensis*
7. Yellow-footed Green Pigeon - *Treron phoenicopterus*
8. Greater Coucal - *Centropus sinensis*
9. Asian Koel - *Eudynamys scolopaceus*
10. Red-wattled Lapwing - *Vanellus indicus*
11. Little Cormorant - *Microcarbo niger*
12. Black-crowned Night Heron - *Nycticorax nycticorax*
13. Eastern Cattle-Egret - *Ardea coromanda*
14. Oriental Honey-buzzard - *Pernis ptilorhynchus*



Indian Pitta (*Pitta brachyura*)

15. Eurasian Griffon - *Gyps fulvus*
16. Short-toed Snake-Eagle - *Circaetus gallicus*
17. Shikra - *Tachyspiza badia*
18. Black Kite - *Milvus migrans*
19. Asian Barred Owlet - *Glaucidium cuculoides*
20. Common Hoopoe - *Upupa epops*
21. Indian Grey Hornbill - *Ocyeros birsostris*
22. Asian Green Bee-eater - *Merops orientalis*
23. White-throated Kingfisher - *Halcyon smyrensis*
24. Indian Roller - *Coracias benghalensis*
25. Brown-headed Barbet - *Psilopogon zeylanicus*
26. Black-rumped Flameback - *Dinopium benghalense*

27. Rose-ringed Parakeet - *Psittacula krameria*
28. Plum-headed Parakeet - *Psittacula cyanocephala*
29. Indian Pitta - *Pitta brachyura*
30. Indian Golden Oriole - *Oriolus kundoo*
31. Black Drongo - *Dicrurus macrocercus*
32. Rufous Treepie - *Dendrocitta vagabunda*
33. House Crow - *Corvus splendens*
34. Asian Tit - *Parus cinereus*
35. Common Tailorbird - *Orthotomus sutorius*
36. Grey-breasted Prinia - *Prinia hodgsonii*
37. Ashy Prinia - *Prinia socialis*
38. Dusky Crag-Martin - *Ptyonoprogne concolor*
39. Wire-tailed Swallow - *Hirundo smithii*
40. Red-vented Bulbul - *Pycnonotus cafer*
41. Himalayan Bulbul - *Pycnonotus leucogenys*
42. Black-chinned Babbler - *Cyanoderma Pyrrhops*
43. Jungle Babbler - *Argya striata*
44. Brahminy Starling - *Sturnia pagodarum*
45. Chestnut-tailed Starling - *Sturnia malabarica*
46. Common Myna - *Acridotheres tristis*
47. Indian Robin - *Copsychus fulicatus*
48. Oriental Magpie-Robin - *Copsychus saularis*
49. Pied Bushchat - *Saxicola caprata*
50. Brown Rock Chat - *Oenanthe fusca*
51. Purple Sunbird - *Cinnyris asiaticus*
52. Baya Weaver - *Ploceus philippinus*
53. House Sparrow - *Passer domesticus*
54. Yellow-throated Sparrow - *Gymnoris xanthocollis*
55. Crested Bunting - *Emberiza lathami*



White-throated Munia (*Euodice malabarica*)
by Sarbjeet Kaur

CBC FIELD TRIP: MORNI HILLS, HARYANA

14 June 2026: 0530 hrs to 1100 hrs

Birders:

1. Sarbjeet Kaur
2. Amandeep Singh
3. Sumeet
4. Karandeep Singh
5. Gurdip Boparai
6. Devinder Hanspal
7. Satyavati
8. Rashi Jain +3
9. Sushil Chahal
10. Dr. Vishv Deep Singh
11. Kanwar Bir Singh
12. Shilpi

June field trip was taken to Morni Hills, via Berwala, upto Badi Sher turning. One of the birds everyone wanted to see were the pair of White-rumped Shama and Indian Pitta.

The birders all met up at our usual Housing Board traffic lights and we went via Nada Sahib road. Our first stop was on Berwala Bird Sanctuary bridge, looking for Blue-tailed Bee-eaters and Chestnut-headed Bee-eaters.

Not finding much and being bothered by the monkeys we moved on, stopping wherever we could find movement. One particular spot was very inviting for we saw a number of birds.

Our next stop was at the Thapli-Morni T point, where we stopped for tea and breakfast. Here, we saw the Oriental Pied Hornbill, way up in the trees. One of our cars, trailing behind also spotted the Indian Pitta.

Our final stop was at Badi Sher, where we spent nearly an hour, finding a number of bush birds, and woodpeckers. We saw the Indian Golden Oriole, Rusty-cheeked Scimitar Babbler, and many others. On our way back, we even saw a Red-headed Vulture fly by us, and an Oriental Honey Buzzard. We stopped for the Shamas, but to our disappointment we could not spot any.

Checklist:

1. Indian Peafowl - *Pavo cristatus*
2. Red Junglefowl - *Gallus gallus*
3. Grey Francolin - *Ortygornis pondicerianus*
4. Black Francolin - *Francolinus francolinus*

5. Rock Pigeon (Feral Pigeon) - *Columba livia* (Feral Pigeon)
6. Eurasian Collared-Dove - *Streptopelia decaocto*
7. Spotted Dove - *Streptopelia tranquebarica*
8. Laughing Dove (Little Brown Dove) - *Spilopelia chinensis*
9. Yellow-footed Green-Pigeon - *Spilopelia senegalensis*



Wire-tailed Swallow (*Hirundo smithii*)



Fulvous-breasted Woodpecker
(*Dendrocopos macei*)

10. Greater Coucal - *Treron phoenicopterus*
11. Square-tailed Drongo-Cuckoo - *Centropus sinensis*
12. Common Hawk-Cuckoo - *Surniculus lugubris*
13. Red-wattled Lapwing - *Vanellus indicus*
14. Eastern Cattle-Egret - *Ardea coromanda*
15. Egyptian Vulture - *Neophron percnopterus*



Indian Golden Oriole (*Oriolus kundoo*)

16. Oriental Honey-buzzard - *Pernis ptilorhynchus*
17. Red-headed Vulture - *Sarcogyps calvus*
18. Himalayan Griffon - *Gyps himalayensis*
19. Shikra - *Tachyspiza badia*
20. Jungle Owlet - *Glaucidium radiatum*
21. Indian Grey Hornbill - *Ocyrceros birostris*
22. Oriental Pied-Hornbill - *Anthracoceros albirostris*
23. Asian Green Bee-eater - *Merops orientalis*
24. Chestnut-headed Bee-eater - *Merops leschenaulti*
25. White-throated Kingfisher - *Halcyon smyrnensis*
26. Coppersmith Barbet - *Psilopogon haemacephalus*
27. Brown-headed Barbet - *Psilopogon zeylanicus*
28. Blue-throated Barbet - *Psilopogon asiaticus*
29. Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker - *Yungipicus nanus*



Rusty-cheeked Scimitar Babbler (*Erytherogenys erythrogenys*)

30. Fulvous-breasted Woodpecker - *Dendrocopos macei*
31. Grey-headed Woodpecker - *Picus canus*
32. Eurasian Hobby - *Falco subbuteo*
33. Plum-headed Parakeet - *Psittacula cyanocephala*
34. Indian Pitta - *Pitta brachyura*
35. Indian Golden Oriole - *Oriolus kundoo*
36. Common Woodshrike - *Tephrodornis pondicerianus*
37. Common Iora - *Aegithina tiphia*
38. Ashy Drongo - *Dicrurus leucophaeus*
39. Rufous Treepie - *Dendrocitta vagabunda*
40. Grey Treepie - *Dendrocitta formosae*
41. House Crow - *Corvus splendens*

42. Large-billed Crow - *Corvus macrorhynchos*
43. Cinereous Tit - *Parus cinereus*
44. Common Tailorbird - *Orthotomus sutorius*
45. Himalayan Prinia - *Prinia crinigera*
46. Grey-breasted Prinia - *Prinia hodgsonii*
47. Barn Swallow - *Hirundo rustica*
48. Wire-tailed Swallow - *Hirundo smithii*
49. Eastern Red-rumped Swallow - *Cecropis daurica*
50. Red-vented Bulbul - *Pycnonotus cafer*
51. Himalayan Bulbul - *Pycnonotus leucogenys*
52. Grey-hooded Warbler - *Phylloscopus xanthoschistos*
53. Indian White-eye - *Zosterops palpebrosus*
54. Rusty-cheeked Scimitar-Babbler - *Erythrogonys erythrogonys*
55. Puff-throated Babbler - *Pellorneum ruficeps*



Oriental Honey Buzzard (*Pernis ptilorhynchus*)

56. Jungle Babbler - *Argya striata*
57. Chestnut-tailed Starling - *Sturnia malabarica*
58. Common Myna - *Acridotheres tristis*
59. Orange-headed Thrush - *Geokichla citrina*
60. Indian Robin - *Copsychus fulicatus*
61. Oriental Magpie-Robin - *Copsychus saularis*
62. Blue-capped Rock-Thrush - *Monticola cinclorhyncha*
63. Pied Bushchat - *Saxicola caprata*
64. Brown Rock Chat - *Oenanthe fusca*
65. Purple Sunbird - *Cinnyris asiaticus*
66. Crimson Sunbird - *Aethopyga siparaja*
67. Yellow-throated Sparrow - *Gymnoris xanthocollis*
68. Crested Bunting - *Emberiza lathami*

Chandigarh Bird Club®

Chandigarh Bird Club® is a registered organisation formed by a group of local birdwatchers. The idea is to record the local avifauna, its habitats, and help make the residents of Tri-City aware of birds in our region and protect them.

Incepted in 2008, the Chandigarh Bird Club® dedicated itself to its goal of protecting the environment.

The Club owes its existence to those few dedicated and expert members who started this Club in Chandigarh Boat Club; namely Navjit Singh, Narbir Kahlon, Vikramjit Singh, Mrs Rima Dhillon, Mrs Sarbjeet Kaur, and Mrs Geeta Goswami.

The fundamental objectives of Chandigarh Bird Club® continue to be to:

- *Bring people, especially the younger generation, closer to nature through birding and help them to enjoy the outdoors while making it a fun activity.*
- *Make individuals and governments more sensitive towards the environment to create a dynamic database for analysis to focus on conservation efforts.*
- *Create a forum for birders to share information and discuss related activities.*



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Back Cover - Green-backed Tit (*Parus monticolos*) by Rick Toor

