



Whispering Wings®

NEWSLETTER OF THE CHANDIGARH BIRD CLUB



Issue 03

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Mitinderpal Singh Sekhon

Editor-in-chief

ਮਉਲੀ ਧਰਤੀ ਮਉਲੀਆ ਆਕਾਸ਼ ॥

ਘੱਟ ਘੱਟ ਮਉਲਿਆ ਆਤਮ ਪ੍ਰਗਾਸ਼ ॥੧॥

Raag Basant, Bani Kabir ji, Sri Guru

Granth Sahib

Bhagat Kabir ji describes
spring as:

*"The Earth is in flower,
the sky is in bloom,
Every heart has blossomed
forth,
And the souls are illu-
minated."*

Winter wanes
and spring arrives. Skeins
of ducks, in 'V' formations
fly back to their summer
homes. Here, in Chandi-
garh, the spring touches every thing with
its magic wand, transforming gardens,
fields and forests into a riot of colour.
The birds moult, shedding their drab win-
ter plumage and don robes of myriad
hues. The air is replete with birdsong - it
is time to woo and love is in the air!

It is now that the birders too
moult, shedding their winter wear and
gear up to feast their eyes and train the
cameras at our feathered friends in their

wedding finery. Singing, dancing,
displaying birds, resplendent in their
breeding plumages set the hearts
pounding and feet racing...the
'deewangi' of spring touches every
one.



Mitinderpal Singh Sekhon
Editor-in-Chief

The past winter
saw a drop in number of
winter migrants in our
region but a tremendous
increase in birding activi-
ty. The reason for the
former is perhaps a glob-
al climate change but
later results from the en-
thusiasm of people of
Chandigarh. Chandigarh
birders have traveled
pan-India for bird watch-
ing. They have also con-
tributed immensely towards bird cen-
sus and bird counts held at various
places in Punjab and Himachal for
which they deserve great kudos. The
spirit of birding has caught up in real
earnest and Chandigarh Bird Club
membership grows by the day.

A great challenge poses it-
self for the birders though. The wet-
lands of this region are facing a dou-
ble jeopardy - lack of rains this past

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year and human en-
croachment. A step for-
ward for the club as a
whole would be to
spread awareness and
petition concerned peo-
ple, both locals and ad-
ministrators so that the
wet lands at Mote
Majra, Chappar Chiri,
Alamgir and Siswan Res-
ervoir, could be saved. It
would save the homes
and habitat of our avian
friends.

**"May you always hear
the bird song!"**

SPECIES UNDER THE SCOPE: PURPLE SUNBIRD

Aparajita Lobana

The Purple Sunbird (*Cinnyris asiaticus*) is a small sunbird belonging to the Order Passeriformes. Sunbirds are generally considered to form part of the family *Nectariniidae* together with sugarbirds, flowerpeckers, and spiderhunters.

Conservation Status

Schedule IV, according to Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, and classified as Least Concern by the IUCN.

Physical characteristics

The Purple Sunbird is a small bird, with size between 9 cm to 12 cm. It has a medium-length down-curved bill, with a brush-tipped tubular tongue that enables it to reach into deep flowers to collect nectar, a dark and short square-ended tail tipped in white, and has distinctive sexual dimorphism. The plumage of the breeding adult male is metallic dark blue and purple with dark brown wings that appears all black usually except in some lighting when the purple iridescence becomes visible. Breeding males will sometimes show their yellow pectoral tufts in courtship displays, which are otherwise hidden. They have bright blue shoulder patches and an iridescent maroon collar around the neck.

The female is brown or olive brown above and dull yellow below, that becomes paler towards the vent. She has a darkish eye stripe with a pale supercilium beyond the eye. In areas where more than one species of sunbirds is found, the habits of the sunbirds can help in identification of females. Sunbirds are very rarely seen alone and are usually in pairs or in small groups. Males are often easy to recognize, and the females that accompany them are often



Purple Sunbird

likely to be of the same species. Juveniles often look like the females and pose the same identification problems.

The non-breeding male looks like the female but has dark wings and a broad black stripe that runs down through the middle of the chest, and also has vestigial iridescence in his plumage.

Distribution, habit and habitat

Purple Sunbirds are distributed widely, from sub-Saharan tropical Africa, the eastern tip of the Arabian Peninsula through the Indian sub-continent and into Southeast Asia. They are resident birds (non-migratory) in most parts of their range and do not move large distances. Short-distance / local movements (particularly in the drier areas of north-western India and Pakistan) where they are said to arrive in large numbers before summer, and altitudinal migration pattern have been noted in some parts of their range - most likely as they follow the flowering seasons of their favourite feeding flowers. They are found mainly in the plains but may move up to 2500 m in southern India and up to 1800 m in the Himalayas.

The Purple Sunbird is a common and familiar species all over its range. These birds inhabit light deciduous forests, semi forests as well as gardens, groves, cultivated areas and scrub country and even dense urban areas, where they are usually observed near flowering shrubs and trees.

There are three subspecies, described below with their ranges.

Indian Purple Sunbird (*Cinnyris asiaticus asiaticus*), the nominate sub-

species, is found in India east of the desert region and south of the Himalayas, extending to the west and south of India and Sri Lanka.

Short-billed Purple Sunbird (*Cinnyris asiaticus brevirostris*), is found in western India (dry western zones of Rajasthan and Gujarat), Pakistan, eastern Afghanistan, southeastern Iran, and Eastern Arabian Peninsula, including northern United Arab Emirates, northern and central Oman). Their yellow pectoral tufts have a slight tinge of green.

Long-billed Purple Sunbird (*Cinnyris asiaticus intermedius*) is found in East India, ranging southwards from Assam to the border of Orissa and northern Andhra Pradesh), northwards into Bangladesh, and east to Myanmar, southern China and Indochina.

Feeding habits

Like other sunbirds, purple sunbirds are essentially nectar feeders, using their long and slender curved bill to probe into flowers for nectar. They have relatively short wings with a fast and direct flight and can take nectar by hovering like a hummingbird, their New World counterpart, but prefer to perch at the base of flowers. In the process of nectar feeding, they help to cross-pollinate flowers. Some native plant species -

such as *Butea monosperma*, *Acacia*, *Woodfordia* and *Dendrophthoe* - are dependent on them for pollination. However, sometimes, they pierce the base of the flowers to reach at the nectar, thus bypassing the pollen. They also take fruits, small berries, and cultivated grapes. To varying degrees, they also feed on invertebrates such as small insects and spiders, particularly when feeding their young. Insects are usually captured in mid-air. They play a very important role in the ecosystem in pollination as



well as keeping the insect populations under check.

They are bold and aggressive and will often fight off larger birds from a preferred food source. Males are generally territorial and will chase off other males from their patch.

Breeding / Nesting

Purple Sunbirds usually breed before the onset of the monsoon season, which varies by region. In northern India, it is from April to June and in

southern India from January to June. A breeding male perches on the topmost branches of a tree, or in some other exposed situation, performs a courtship display, which involves raising his head, fanning his tail and fluttering with partly open wings to expose his pectoral tufts while singing excitedly to the female.

During the breeding months, the female purple sunbird constructs a hanging oval or pear-shaped nest. The nest is typical of the sunbirds - an oblong pouch made of unwoven thin strips of vegetation, lichens, and bark, and held together by cobwebs. The entrance hole is on the side near the top, often shaded by an overhanging projection. The inner cavity is expanded by the bird

by opening its wing and turning around on the inside. The nest is built within a 5-10 day period. The nest is typically suspended from a low branch, often of a thorny bush, but at times is attached to man-made objects, such as wires. A clutch consists of 1-3 eggs (mostly 2), greyish or greenish in color with white marks and shades of brown and grey which are incubated by the female alone. The young hatch about 14-18 days later. The

male assists in feeding the young but it is done largely by the female. Both parents will join other birds to mob owls or other predators in order to protect their nests and their young. A fledgling Purple Sunbird (a young one who has moved out of nest but still fed and cared by the parents)

can be identified from its “clown mouth” i.e. yellow bordering the mouth.

Calls / Vocalizations / Sounds

Purple sunbirds are quite noisy, with calls that sound like *chwit*, *chwin* notes or hum-

ming *zit zit* and sometimes a sharp *wich-wich*, and a song that is described as a rapid rattle followed by ringing, metallic notes. The female is less vocal than the male and may often be silent.

GET CLOSER AND PERSONAL

SPOTTER SCOPE

Mitinderpal Singh Sekhon

A spotting scope is a small telescope modified for use during daylight hours. It differs from an astronomical telescope in several ways.

1. A spotting scope always produces an upright image whereas a telescope used in astronomy may produce a reversed image or even an upside down image.
2. A spotting scope is much smaller in size than an astronomical telescope, mainly for the sake of portability.
3. A spotting scope is a lower magnification instrument than a telescope.
4. A spotting scope is mounted on an ordinary photo tripod unlike a special one for astronomical telescope.
5. Most spotting scopes are waterproof and fogproof - a ra-

re feature in an astronomical telescope.

Spotting scopes are used anytime you need more magnification than a binocular provides. Spotting scopes are widely used for birding, viewing wildlife and other distant objects. Spotting scopes are also used to take long distance pictures with a variety of cameras.

The spotting scopes are labeled with three numbers. The first two numbers represent the magnification range and the last number is always the size of the front lens. For example, a 20-60 x 85 model, you have a spotting scope with a zoom magnification range of 20-60 x with a front lens of 85mm diameter.

Magnification

Magnification of spotting scopes starts from where conventional binoculars stop. The higher magnifications offered by a spotting scope allow you to view birds,

wildlife and other objects that are well beyond the range of a conventional binocular, but there are limits to magnification. Two things determine how much magnification you can use in a spotting scope.

The first is the atmosphere. You must always factor in the seeing conditions of the atmosphere when using a spotting scope. Heat waves, dust, humidity, glare, wind and air currents during the day all reduce image quality and the greater the magnification, the more drastic the reduction in image quality. A major limit on magnification is the optical system of the spotting scope, itself. Regardless of the model, there will always be some drop off in image quality as magnification goes up. This is determined primarily by the quality of the optical system. Here you get what you pay for in a very visible way. Inexpensive spotting scopes, regardless of size or type, lose image quality quickly as magnification goes up, but premium

grade scopes lose very little in image quality, even at the highest magnification. A spotting scope that is as sharp at 60x as it is at 20x is very expensive.

Objective Lens

The larger the objective lens, the more detail you can see and the better image quality your scope will deliver, especially at higher magnifications, assuming you are comparing two models of similar quality. However, a large lens of mediocre quality,

no matter how large, will never equal the performance of a smaller, quality lens. When in doubt, go for quality, not size.

you more, but it can deliver image quality on a par with a larger objectives made of standard glass. If portability is an issue, a smaller model with ED glass or other special glass may be all the spotting scope you will ever need. If you need the absolute best in performance, however, there is still no substitute for a large, quality objective made with high performance glass.

Close Focus

A spotting scope with a close

focus of less than 20 ft is preferable, especially if you plan to use a spotting scope in thicker vegetation or for digiscoping with a camera.

Lens Coatings

Lens coatings improve light transmission and decrease chromatic aberration which is important in a high magnification instrument such as a spotting scope. There are usually three kinds of coatings; "fully coated", "multi-coated" and "fully multi-



Angled Spotter Scope

coated". All premium grade models are fully multi-coated with special chemicals whose formulas vary from manufacturer to manufacturer but are essential for quality viewing.

ty, no matter how large, will never equal the performance of a smaller, quality lens. When in doubt, go for quality, not size.

You can also improve the performance of any spotting scope, especially at higher magnifications, with special quality glass (ED glass, APO glass, HD glass, Fluorite glass) in the objective. This option will cost

Eye Relief

It is the distance your eye can be from the eyepiece and still see the entire field of view and is an important feature if you wear eye-

Prism Type

Most spotting scopes these days as in binoculars, have a prism inside them which is used to turn the image right side up and correct it

right to left. Two prism types are used in these spotting scope:

- Porro prism spotting scopes are by far the most common and better of the two. The porro prism design is the most efficient in terms of optics and is also the easiest and least expensive prism to produce. Bak-4 glass prism is the preferred glass. BK7 glass prism in a spotting scope is a sign of low quality.

A waterproof spotting scope is not a necessity but it is still a good feature to have as the seals in a waterproof model keep out dust and dirt adding to the lifespan of the spotting scope.

Eyepieces

Some spotting scopes include the eyepiece in the price and some do not. Most low to medium priced spotting scopes include the eyepiece. Many of these do not have a removable eyepiece. Higher priced spot-

ting scopes, though, offer removable eyepieces and a selection of eyepieces for different uses and magnifications. On these models, the eyepiece is often not included in the price. When you see a model advertised as "body only" it means you need to buy an eyepiece separately and add it to the price of the spotting scope. Although a single power eyepiece has its own advantages, the convenience of a zoom eyepiece is preferable. This is especially true

Camera Adapters

Many spotting scopes are camera adaptable but it depends on the type of camera being used. DSLR cameras require very specific adapters, but you can attach a small digital point and shoot camera to



- Roof prism spotting scopes offer the advantage of being slim and compact, but they are not as efficient as a porro prism and usually lack many of the added features of the porro prism design such as interchangeable eyepieces, camera adapters and so on. The only reason to choose a roof prism spotting scope is its extreme portability.

Straight Spotter Scope

ting scopes, though, offer removable eyepieces and a selection of eyepieces for different uses and magnifications. On these models, the eyepiece is often not included in the price. When you see a model advertised as "body only" it means you need to buy an eyepiece separately and add it to the price of the spotting scope. Although a single power eyepiece has its own advantages, the convenience of a zoom eyepiece is preferable. This is especially true

nearly any spotting scope with a universal digital adapter. This is called "digiscoping" and is an effective way to take pictures through a spotting scope.

Weight

A spotting scope and tripod used from a permanent location or from a vehicle is one thing, but a spotting scope and tripod carried on your shoulder as you hike is quite another. So choose carefully.

Waterproof Spotting Scopes

Tripods

You cannot handhold a spotting scope due to its high magnification. It must be supported to steady it. There is no need to buy a special tripod for a spotting scope. All spotting scopes are threaded like a camera and will fit on any standard camera/video tripod.

Straight versus Angled

Spotting scopes come in two general configurations—straight viewing and angled viewing. The difference is at the rear of the scope, where the erecting prism directs the light path straight in line with the body, or at an angle, typically 45 degrees, to the body.

The straight or angled configuration is one of the first considerations that a birder must evaluate when buying a spotting scope. In general the angled scope offers more viewing comfort.

Authors Opinion

- *Angled scopes with 20 -60x magnification and 80mm or more optical lens with waterproofing are the best bet.*
- *Interchangeable zoom eye pieces are preferable.*
- *Buying a spare tripod plate for your camera tripod is also advised as same tripod can be used for both and change from scope to camera or vice-versa can be made quickly.*
- *Digiscoping is an added advantage for recording birds from greater distances so camera adapter is advised.*
- *Although multicoated lens add to the cost, but should be preferred.*
- *Do check for the prism glass and insist on Porro prism of BAK -4 glass as the image quality with any other is greatly diminished.*

- *And at the end, remember all good things are costly!*
- *Author uses a Vanguard Endeavour HD 82A Spotting Scope.*

Main Feature & Specifications

- *82mm Objective Lens containing Extra-low Dispersion Glass (ED) elements*
- *Dual Focus Wheel*
- *100% Fog and Waterproof*
- *Fully Multi-coated Lenses*
- *Phase Coated BAK -4 Prisms*
- *Eye Relief: 19mm - 20mm*
- *20-60x Interchangeable Eyepiece*
- *Weight: 1810g*
- *Dimensions: 38cm x 18cm*

Happy birding...May you always hear the bird song!

ROUND - N - ROUND IN VILLA ROUND, NAHAN

Amandeep Singh

On the Valentine's Day, which happened to coincide with our monthly outing of the club, Rima Dhillon, Dr. Bhupesh, Jasbir Randhawa, and I, in one car, and Mohit, Sidharth and Saiyam in another, went up to Nahan for birding. Nahan happened to be

a new spot for us Chandigarh birders. Villa round, where the Sirmour District Court, the Deputy Commissioner's Office, and other local government offices are located, is the specific area in Nahan. Enclosing a road which goes round these offices, screened off from the flow of traffic,

meant solely for recreation and morning walks, it is an admirable work done by the Environmental Society of Nahan®.

We reached Villa Round at day-break, well before the team 2 of our group. We waited for them, while the bird activity increased. Rima

Ma'am BKG Sir and I had been here previously so we headed a little ahead to scout, while the rest perched on a rooftop, conveniently located just next a cluster of trees, where the Fire-tailed Sunbird made an appearance.

All along the way we added many birds to our bag, diverting off the route once or twice, where to my delight, I saw the first of my lifers for the day.

But in the end we all congregated at the afore-mentioned rooftop. While going there, which was when the sun had already come

up directly over our heads, we saw a very well camouflaged Brown-headed Barbet.

With a brief lunch and chat, team 2 returned to Chandigarh along the

Bhojnagar. It turned out that another lifer was awaiting me in the form of a Black-headed Jay, brilliantly spotted by Rima Ma'am. The return leg was made all the more memorable by the

extravagant sighting of a group of Steppe Eagles perched on trees and flying about the area.

All these sightings, made Valentine's Day, which held no important significance either to me

or Mohit Sir, turned out to be a great day altogether.



Fire-tailed Sunbird

Kala Amb route, which is the direct way up, while we went back via

NAHAN—VILLA ROUND BIRD LIST

1. Babbler, Jungle
2. Barbet, Brown-headed
3. Barbet, Great
4. Bulbul, Himalayan
5. Bulbul, Red-vented
6. Bunting, White-capped
7. Chiffchaff, Common
8. Crow, House
9. Dove, Collared
10. Drongo, Black
11. Drongo, Spangled
12. Eagle, Steppe



Tickell's Blue Flycatcher

13. Fantail, Yellow-bellied
14. Flowerpecker, Pale-billed
15. Flycatcher, Grey-headed Canary
16. Flycatcher, Rufous-gorgeted
17. Flycatcher, Tickell's Blue
18. Flycatcher-shrike, Bar-winged
19. Jay, Black-headed
20. Kestrel, Common

21. Kite, Black

- 22. Laughingthrush, Streaked
- 23. Minivet, Long-tailed
- 24. Nuthatch, Chestnut-bellied
- 25. Owlet, Asian Barred
- 26. Parakeet, Plum-headed
- 27. Prinia, Ashy
- 28. Robin, Oriental Magpie
- 29. Rockchat, Brown
- 30. Rockthrush, Chestnut-bellied
- 31. Sibia, Rufous
- 32. Sunbird, Fire-tailed
- 33. Sunbird, Purple
- 34. Tailorbird
- 35. Tit, Cinereous
- 36. Treepie, Rufous
- 37. Vulture, Gryffon
- 38. Vulture, Himalayan
- 39. Warbler, Grey-hooded
- 40. White-eye, Oriental



Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher



Brown-headed barbet

EFFORTLESS BIRDING IN JAMNAGAR

Dr. Bhupesh Kumar Goyal

This is the punch line the trip operators used to promote their January birding trip to Jamnagar. And exactly so it turned out to be... absolutely EFFORTLESS indeed. You did not have to go searching for the birds, you only stood or walked along - and the birds of different shapes, sizes and behaviour came to you!

A flight to Ahmedabad followed by an auto-rickshaw ride to the Railway Station led us to the birding party coming by train from Mumbai and we reached Jamnagar in the morning of 28 Jan, as scheduled. Mandy and I started birding while in the train itself and spotted Chestnut bellied sandgrouse from the train window besides others including what looked like a Sirkeer malkoha to Mandy.

With Adesh and Mandar, two accomplished birders from Mumbai to lead us, we headed for Bedibunder and Rozybunder area of Jamnagar with its wide expanses of shallow water soon after lunch. As soon as we dismounted from our Boleros, we were treated to the sight of gulls (brown-headed, black-headed as well as slender billed), glossy ibises, shovelers, black-tailed

godwits, spot billed ducks, common teals, black headed ibises, whiskered terns, ruffs and stints. What got even Adesh really excited was the sighting of a yellow-legged stint with speckled upper parts. "It's a lifer for me! It is a Long-toed stint!!" There were only two of them and the whole group of fifteen got busy clicking this unusual sighting! A walk towards the main water body of Bedibunder showed a gathering of at least twenty painted storks at the edge and



Red-naped Ibis

hundreds of lesser flamingos inside the water. We could also see Eurasian curlews, common redshanks and a few sandpipers there. Then we headed for Rozybunder where a pair of the beautiful Great thick-knees were perched on a bund by the roadside, as if waiting for us to capture them in our cameras and our hearts. Just behind them was another lifer for me - a Desert wheatear male. A sand lark popped on the

road soon for all to see. Hundreds of flamingos with the red sky of the setting sun in the background was a sight to behold! When we could see no more, we dragged ourselves back to the hotel where we soon compiled the list of the day's sightings. Gujarati cuisine at a typically Gujarati eatery provided the gastronomic delight.

The next day was going to be a hectic day and we had been warned. We were headed for the

Narara Marine National Park, about a hundred kilometres from Jamnagar. We started real early and got to see the Dalmatian pelican, graceful Prinia, long billed pipit, osprey, sand lark and many other waders and waterfowls by the side of the road as we moved towards our destination. Once

there, we took a break for breakfast. The scrub around the place provided sightings of the grey francolin, rosy starlings, isabelline shrikes and the purple sunbirds. As we moved into the marine park, with a marine guide leading us, we were greeted by the greater and lesser sand plovers, busy foraging all around us. The dry sand changed into wet sand and that changed gradually into nearly knee-deep water. As we walked/waded along,

we saw a great variety of waders- grey plover, marsh sandpiper, curlew sandpiper, Terek sandpiper, dunlin, ruddy turnstone, whimbrel, Eurasian curlew and finally the crab-plover. Lesser crested terns and variety of cormorants and darters were also there. The marine guide showed us puffer fish and how it puffed up to thrice its size when brought out of water, octopus and how it would make sharp squirts of water at the aggressor and then inject ink into water all around to avoid sighting.

Also on show were a variety of corals, crabs, sponges, algae and oysters! One section of the marine park had the corals actually being farmed!

It was past mid-day when we left for Khambhaliya where Kathiawadi flavours were waiting for us at Hotel Milan. The ear wear of the local women captured the imagination of most of the party and they were delighted to display their ears for our lenses.

Post lunch, we headed for Charkala salt pans, one of the very few places in India where one can sight black necked grebes. Though the grebes were not close to the edge, but the spotterscope of the guides came real handy in giving us a good sighting of both the black necked and great crested grebes. By now, easy sighting of pelicans, painted storks, ruffs and other wad-

ers had become passe for us. On the way back, we stopped at Ranjipur, the house for Demoiselle cranes. The village pond had more than a hundred Demoiselle cranes gathered together in perfect military discipline, looking intently ahead with their beautiful red eyes! You could actually go hug them if you wished! The pond also had snipes (common and pin-tailed), comb ducks, northern pin-tails, various sandpipers, cormorants, redshanks and stints. The Eurasian sparrow hawk could be seen by

tufted ducks and common Pochards were available in plenty. We could also see dozens of wigeons. There were a few gadwalls and comb ducks and an occasional garganey (that I could not see). Besides, large number of flamingos, both greater and lesser, provided the backdrop. Baby flamingos with their black-and-white gawky body were also there. Soon a flock of red-naped ibises also landed there. Lots of other waders completed the list of water birds in this habitat. A look into the

sky showed us Eurasian marsh harrier as well as a solitary Brahminy kite. A red naped ibis perched on a high pole was an absolute delight for the photographers.

The afternoon was scheduled for Balachadi, considering Khijadiya, the famous bird sanctuary of Jamnagar, had gone completely dry this season and

did not get any birds. Crested larks, sand larks and desert wheatears were like the house sparrows around the Balachadi beach. We walked along the rocky beach and got to see large flocks of redshanks and sandpipers and a few of the bar-tailed godwits also, that are only seen along the sea face. The sunset on the beach was really beautiful. As we climbed into our vehicles and were ready to move, Adesh directed us all to stop and dismount. "There is a Nightjar around. It is calling!" With



Rosy Starling

some and Asian paradise flycatcher make by some others. There were more sightings of some strangely attractive ear wear! We reached the hotel back around nine!

Next morning, we headed for the station area which invites a large number of migratory birds. The water bodies swarmed with flamingos, waders and waterfowls and our guides took proper classes (and tests) on identification of these birds. Shovelers, pintails, teals, spot billed ducks,

a small torch we headed in the direction of the call and could see it flying around the nearby trees. Ten minutes of search for a closer look at the bird did not yield any result and we had to be contented with the Nightjar's call and silhouette.

The last morning was for Lakhotalake, situated in the heart of the city. The gulls were flying all around us. The

mirror patch on the wing tips and the pale iris of the brown headed gull was all too clear to each of us. Pochards, tufted ducks, comb ducks, common courts, spot billed ducks, hundreds of ruffs and various cormorants comprised majority of the bird population. The treat was to see a mallard pair from up close. The brilliant green head and yellow

beak of the male were captivating. All good things come to an end. So did this birding trip to Jamnagar, the first exclusive birding outing for me. It gave me 35 lifers and a lifetime of wonderful memories! Next time you want an easy addition to your life list - just head for Jamnagar!

HIMALYAN FIELD TRIP BIRD LIST

1. Babbler, Common
2. Bee-eater, Green
3. Bluethroat
4. Bulbul, Red-vented
5. Coot, Common
6. Cormorant, Great
7. Cormorant, Indian
8. Cormorant, Little
9. Crane, Common
10. Crane, Demoiselle
11. Crow, House
12. Curlew, Eurasian
13. Darter
14. Dove, Eurasian Collared
15. Dove, Laughing
16. Drongo, Black
17. Duck, Comb
18. Dunlin
19. Egret, Great
20. Egret, Intermediate



Ruddy Turnstone

21. Egret, Pacific Reef
22. Eurasian sparrowhawk
23. Falcon, Peregrine
24. Flamingo, Greater
25. Flamingo, Lesser
26. Flycatcher, Asian Paradise
27. Francolin, Grey
28. Garganey
29. Grebe, Black necked
30. Grebe, Great crested
31. Grebe, Little
32. Greenshank, Common
33. Gull, Black head-
34. Gull, Brown headed
35. Gull, Slender billed
36. Harrier, Eurasian marsh
37. Heron, Grey
38. Heron, Indian pond

39. Hoopoe
40. Ibis, Black headed
41. Ibis, Glossy
42. Ibis, Red-naped
43. Kingfisher, White-throated
44. Kite, Black
45. Kite, Black shouldered
46. Kite, Brahminy
47. Lapwing, Red-wattled
48. Lark, Ashy-crowned sparrow
49. Lark, Sand
50. Lark, Syke's
51. Mallard
52. Martin, Common
53. Myna, Common
54. Osprey
55. Parakeet, Rose-ringed
56. Peafowl, Indian
57. Pelican, Dalmatian
58. Pigeon, Rock
59. Pintail, Northern
60. Pipit, Long billed
61. Pipit, Paddyfield
62. Pipit, Tawny
63. Plover, Crab
64. Plover, Greater Sand
65. Plover, Grey
66. Plover, Kentish



Ruff

67. Plover, Lesser Sand
68. Plover, Little Ringed
69. Pochard, Common
70. Prinia, Ashy
71. Prinia, Graceful
72. Prinia, Plain
73. Robin, Indian
74. Ruff
75. Sandpiper, Common
76. Sandpiper, Curlew
77. Sandpiper, Green
78. Sandpiper, Marsh
79. Sandpiper, Terek
80. Sandpiper, Wood
81. Shoveler, Northern
82. Shrike, Bay-backed
83. Shrike, Isabelline
84. Shrike, Long-tailed
85. Snipe, Common
86. Snipe, Pin-tailed
87. Sparrow, House
88. Spoonbill, Eurasian
89. Starling, Rosy
90. Stilt, Black winged
91. Stint, Long-toed
92. Stint, Temminck's
93. Stork, Painted
94. Sunbird, Purple
95. Swallow, Red-rumped

- | | |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| 96. Swallow, Wire tailed | 104. Wagtail, White browed |
| 97. Teal, Common | 105. Wagtail, Yellow |
| 98. Tern, Caspian | 106. Wheatear, Desert |
| 99. Tern, Lesser Crested | 107. Whimbrel |
| 100. Tern, Whiskered | 108. White-eye, Oriental |
| 101. Turnstone, Ruddy | 109. Whitethroat, Lesser |
| 102. Wagtail, Citrine | 110. Wigeon, Eurasian |
| 103. Wagtail, White | |

SENSATIONAL BIRDING IN SIKKIM

Narbir Kahlon

Pictures: Narbir Kahlon, Alpana NP Singh

Itinerary

17th Feb Departure from Chandigarh at 4.30am for New Delhi Airport, Spice Jet Flight to Bagdogra airport, departure at 1.40 pm, arrival 3.40pm. Departure from Bagdogra airport for Zuluk at 4 pm, arrival at Zuluk at 11 pm.

18th February Early morning Birding 5.30 am to 10 am between Zuluk and Kupup,

departure for Kolakham (Neora Valley beyond Lava) at 11 am Birding along the way arrival at Kolakham 9 pm. Stay at Neora Valley Jungle Camp. Bookings through Help Tourism Tele +91-353-2433683 / 2535896

19th February Birding in and

around Kolakham.

20th February Departure for Kewzing, Bon Farm House 7.30am. Birding along the way, arrival at Bon farmhouse 5.30 pm. Address: Below Kewzing Monastery, Ravangla Subdivision, Kewzing, Sikkim 737124, Phone: 095476 67788



First rays of light illuminating the Kanchenjunga

contact person Chewang Bonpa.

21st Feb Birding around Kewzing and periphery of Menam wildlife sanctuary with Chewang Bonpa (A Great Help). Bon Farm House Tele

22nd Feb Departure from Kewzing

for Bagdora 5.45 am Birding along the way worth mentioning is Turku below Kewzing, Flight from Bagdogra to New Delhi, Flight from New Delhi to Chandigarh (Special Flight due to Jat agitation) Arrival in Chandigarh 11.05am.

A strong urge to explore the Eastern Himalayan region with its untouched forests and varied avian diversity spurred us to undertake this rather short and hectic birding trip to Neora valley and parts of Sikkim.

While planning the trip, care was taken to try and cover maximum altitudinal varia-

tion and the places covered were : Siliguri 398 ft, Kewzing 4600ft, Lava 7000ft, Zuluk 10,000 ft, Kupup 13000ft, this was done because with altitudinal variation the flora changes and this results in higher avian diversity.

Zuluk and Kupup.

The first day was spent mainly travelling and while others saw nothing of interest, I got a passing glimpse of the Grey-backed Shrike which was a lifer for me . While driving up to Zuluk at night we caught a brief glimpse of an animal approximately three ft long with a banded tail, it was dark and driving through clouds on a narrow road after 12 hours of travel did not help much, but the more I re-flect on it the more I believe it was the Large Indian Civet (*Vivera zibetha Linnaeus*) .

After a comfortable nights rest we left camp at 5.30 am. A few Km above Zuluk day broke over the Himalayas , the first rays illuminating the Kan-chenjunga Peak provided an exhilarating experience. The lovely vistas of Alpine Shrubs and Pastures covered with patches of snow only added to this experience.

At this time of the year bird

density was low and we came across



(L-R):- Col. S.S. Cheema, Narbir Kahlon, Alpana N.P. Singh, and Rima Dhillon

only a few bird species. Worth mentioning are White-browed Rosefinches, Plain Mountain finches, Alpine Accentors , Winter wren , Rufus-vented Tits , Snow Pigeons, Blue-capped Redstart, the area was being patrolled by a few Raptors which included the Upland Buzzard (Seen and pho-tographed by

Of all the birds during this trip the Winter Wren and the Alpine Accentor were the most obliging (for the shutter-bugs), they were not shy and provided ample photo opportunities. The Winter Wren went to the extent of taking us to its home in the rocks surrounding a barrack and after showing us where it lived decided to bask outside its home oblivious to the chatter of clicking

cameras.

We went up to 'Baba Harbhajan Singh's temple' on the road to Kupup and after paying obeisance to the spirit of this soldier who continues to patrol our borders, we de-cided to head back to Zuluk.

Zuluk To Lava.

The area below Zuluk is dominated by temper-ate broad-leaf forests lying on steep moun-tain slopes of the Him-alayas be-tween ap-

Buddha Monument Tashiding Monastery

Alpana), Himalayan Griffon and the Common Kestrel.

proximately 2,000 and 3,000 m (6,600 and 9,800 ft). The Eastern Himalayan broadleaf forests



are diverse and species-rich, with a great diversity of oaks and rhododendrons in particular and many endemic species. The eco-region has two broad forest types: evergreen and deciduous. Evergreen forests are characterized by oaks (*Quercus* spp.), chiefly *Quercus lamellosa*, together with *Lithocarpus pachyphylla*, *Rhododendron arboreum*, *Rhododendron falconeri*, *Rhododendron thomsonii*, *Michelia excelsa*, *Michelia cathartii*, *Bucklandia populnea*, *Symplocos cochinchinensis*, *Magnolia* spp., *Cinnamomum* spp., and *Machilus* (rhododendron species include more than fifty in Sikkim and another sixty in Bhutan.) In the deciduous forests the predominant tree species are Himalayan maple (*Acer campbellii*), *Juglans regia*, *Alnus nepalensis*, *Betula alnoides*, *Betula utilis*, and *Echinocarpus dasycarpus*. Finally in Eastern Nepal and Sikkim there are wetter areas dominated by a mixture of *Magnolia campbellii*, *Acer campbellii* and *Osmanthus suavis* along with Himalayan hazel (*Corylus ferox*).

The reason for mentioning the flora of the region is because we were in this region for a major part of the trip and it yielded the maximum avian species. Large

mixed Hunting Parties and high bird activity characterized this region. (This is where most of us ticked off

our lifers.)

We had decided to bird along the way to Lava and we covered 10 Km in 6 hours, by car !! The



Black-throated Parrotbill

first birds to announce themselves were the Stripe-throated Yuhinia and

the omnipresent Rufous Sibia, shortly thereafter we came across some labourers repairing the road and

they guided us to an abandoned army settlement. (About 4 Km below Zuluk). This is where a bird wave hit us! In the western Himalayas the birds seem to be more disciplined and tend to show themselves well. Here be-

cause of the dense green cover, the birds were playing a game of 'see me if you can'. The wave was being led by Black-throated Parrotbills who were in a feeding frenzy and included the Rufous-capped Babbler, Streaked Scimitar Babbler, Hoary-throated Bar-wing, Chestnut-tailed Minla (Bar-throated Sibia), White-browed Fulvetta, Rusty-winged Fulvetta, Fire-tailed sunbird, Himalayan Blue tail, Black-faced Laughing thrush, Blue Whistling Thrush, Black faced warbler. While this wave engulfed us a Mountain Hawk Eagle was seen patrolling the skies.

Lesser mortals like us were overwhelmed by the flurry of bird activity but Col S S Cheema was able to pick out a single White-browed Piculet from the cloud of birds surrounding us. We spent a good part of an hour at this site.

On proceeding further we came across Rufus-vented Yuhinia, Large Niltava, Red and Blue-tailed Minlas, Blue-fronted Redstart, Chestnut-crowned Laughing thrush (*Garrulax erythrocephalus nigrimentum*) which was different from the nominate race found in the western Himalayas, Eurasian Tree Sparrow, most of these birds were lifers. The journey was spiced up with the excitement over the sighting of a pair of Common Green Magpie. The sun sets earlier in the east and in the fading light we came across a Plain-backed Thrush.

It got rather late reaching Lava (about 8pm) and Kolakham, some distance away appeared even further. The only mammals we came across were the three striped palm squirrel and a mid size deer which seemed to be a hog deer it froze in the headlights and we got an excellent view, but no decent record shot.

A large part of the area around Lava and Kolakham is covered by thick wet subtropical coniferous forest mainly Spruce, this is interspersed with temperate broadleaf forests. We were an enthusiastic lot of birders and were out at day-break. The gate at 'The Neora Valley Jungle Lodge' has a Small

Niltava posted on sentry duty and



Hoary-throated Barwing

we came across it on more than one occasion. Stripe throated Yuhinas and Rufus Sibia were abundant in



Rufous-vented Yuhinia

the area, the call of the Rufus-

throated Partridge and the Hill Partridge rang out across the valley for the best part of the morning, but sightings eluded us. A Black-throated Sunbird responded to the call played by Col Cheema, and I did manage a record shot of the female of the species.

Weather was playing truant as it continued to be overcast and so rather than pushing to the 'Pipeline' after Breakfast we proceeded to Kolakham village and beyond to the Waterfall on Rima's recommendation,

We were not disappointed as we came across Dark-breasted Rosefinch, Mountain Bulbuls, Black-chinned Yuhina, Orange-bellied Leafbird, Rusty-fronted Barwing, Maroon Oriole, Golden-throated Barbet, Crimson-breasted Woodpecker, Long tailed Shrike. I mention the shrike as it was the sub species *Lanius schach tricolor*. Even the Red-vented Bulbul looked different as it was the darker *Pycnonotus cafer bengalensi*. The minivet seen was the Scarlet Minivet, it had a red chevron with two red drops on the secondaries.

While returning from the waterfall we came across a skulker sitting beside the road, to me it appeared to be a slender-billed Scimitar Babbler but it was too

shy and did not give us a chance to photograph it or to get a clear view, in the evening a hot water bath helped to bring relief to the aching muscles and the well cooked meal was more than welcome.

In the morning we slipped past the sentry at the gate (Small Niltava) who was trying to capture a worm squirming on the track and spent some precious moments photographing a Chestnut-bellied Rock Thrush female (It appeared to be much larger than usual), a mixed hunting party had our undivided attention outside camp while at the camp Col Cheema came across a few Black-throated Parrotbills.

There was a lot of bird activity around the 'Neora valley Jungle Camp', but time was not on our side as we had a long journey to Kewzing ahead of us.

For those of you planning a visit, the staff at this facility is courteous and efficient, rooms are clean and spacious and the food is good. Another striking feature of our stay

here were the orchids and flowers.

On The way from Kolakham to Lava we came across a Wren



Dark-breasted Rosefinch

Babbler it appeared to have a stubby tail and was very dark I got a good view before it disappeared into the undergrowth, the only wren babbler fitting the bill appears to be the Spotted Wren Babbler since it was a very brief sighting while I



Golden-fronted Barbet

am making a mention of it here, we have not recorded it in the list, I wish

it had given us a chance to click (it would have been a good record). Another interesting bird feeding besides the track was the Maroon-backed Accentor, we also came across Green-tailed Sunbird, Black faced warbler and Ashy-throated warblers. The Kalij Pheasant we came across was the *Lophura leucomelanos melanota*, the one we were famil-

iar from the area around Chandigarh is the *lophura leucomelanos hamiltonii* and so it was new to us.

We were looking forward to birding around the famous 'mile' but road construction seems to have taken its toll and while the area seemed promising dust was clinging onto the

leaves of most trees. The only birds we came across were Olive backed Pipits, Great Barbets, and the odd Fire-tailed Sunbird which was disappointing.

After Lunch at Rangpo we crossed the Teesta and entered West Sikkim, There was a Bombax

tree with Hair-crested Drongos (Spangled Drongos), Great Barbets

and Red-vented bulbuls ,a few Km down the road a Blue-throated Barbet posed for portraits. Bird calls stopped us near a stream , and we saw the Ashy Bulbul, Maroon Oriole, and warblers flitting around which turned out to be Lemmon-rumped Warblers, a female Plumbeous Water Redstart flashed welcome greetings with its tail.

We were crossing some terraced fields when we almost let a group of birds pass luckily better sense prevailed , for they turned out to be Barred Cuckoo Doves, it was interesting to see so many of them together (20 Nos) , conditions continued to be pathetic so while we enjoyed the sighting we were unable to get the images we desired.

We came across a mixed group of laughing thrushes, Black-faced and Chestnut-crowned, on hindsight maybe even necklaced feeding besides the road , a few Eurasian Tree Sparrows and Golden- throated Barbet later we were in Kewzing.

The Bon Farmhouse offers a comfortable stay and good basic

food more importantly it was nice to catch up with Chewang Bonpa and

after a very welcome cup of tea we handed over our wish list to him one

look at the two pages of fine print and he felt we needed at least a

month in Sikkim, but since we had just another couple of days it was decided that we needed to move early next morning.

The usual birding banter at dinner, the excitement of so many lifers and the promise of a lot more to come blunted the exhaustion and we retired to the comfort of our beds only by

10pm.

In the morning we were up at 4.30 am and left for the area around Maenam Wildlife Sanctuary above the Tashiding Monastery well before sunrise. The literal meaning of *maenam-la* is "treasure-house of medicines", and the flora of the sanctuary is rich in a number of plants of medicinal value. Established in 1987 its periphery is a treasure house of birds.

Birding with Chewang Bonpa was a nice experience, he knew the area well and courtesy his knowledge we were able to come across The Fire-tailed Myzornis,(Unfortunately they were shy and did not come out in the open the views we got were not good), Bay Woodpeckers we got to see both the male and female, Darjeeling Woodpecker, Maroon-backed



Rusty-fronted Barwing



Ashy Bulbul

Accentors , Black-faced Laughing-thrush ,Yellow-throated Fulvetta (who took a liking to Col Cheema and danced around him while his camera provided the background music), the Rufous-throated Wren Babbler responded to the call but being a shy skulker very sensitive to movement it did not break cover and come out in the open. The raptors seen at Maenam were the Shikra and the Mountain Hawk Eagle.

In the evening we birded around the Bon Monastery a Black Eagle could be seen circling the forest. On offer were Brown-throated Treecreeper (Sikkim Treecreeper) , plenty of Green-tailed Sunbirds, Red-tailed and Blue-tailed Minlas, Fire-breasted Flowerpeckers, I got a brief glimpse of the Pygmy Wren Babbler, Rufous-faced Warbler, Hill Prinia, and the Striated Bulbul, We heard The Collared Owlet but did not see it. As the sun set another long and interesting day came to an end in Sikkim.

We had a flight to catch from Bagdogra scheduled to leave at 3pm the driving time from Kewzing is about 5 hours but since we were planning on birding along the way, we left at 5.30am .

It was overcast and the light was bad, in-spite of which we

were able to see and photograph Slaty-backed Forktails, Common



Darjeeling Woodpecker

Green Magpie (what a lovely bird) , and a pair of Eastern Imperial Pi-



Yellow-throated Fulvetta

geon (Mountain Imperial Pigeon). Barred Cuckoo Doves stopped us for tea at a Dhaba(the advertisement

board mentioned the location as Turku), the area around the Dhaba was under cultivation. Grey Treepies and White-crested Laughingthrush looked on as a Lesser Neklaced Laughing-thrush proceeded to bathe in the cool waters of a gentle brook in full view of everyone.

Around the Bend where the Brook met a Mountain Stream sitting on a bough in deep shadows was a plump bird not much bigger than the Plumbeous Water Redstart on processing the image it turned out to be the female of the White-browed Shortwing.

The area seemed to be a birding hotspot as shortly thereafter we came across Ashy Bulbul and a pair of Greater Flamebacks busy carving out their summer residence .

We could have continued birding in the area and I am sure we would have been rewarded with some more lifers but alas we had a flight to catch.

The Himalayan subtropical broadleaf forests is an eco-region that extends from the middle hills of Nepal through Darjeeling into Bhutan and also into the Indian State of Uttar Pradesh. At an altitude of between 500 to 1,000 m (1,600 to 3,300 ft) along the Outer Himalayan Range, its location on the south slope of the Himalayas allows the inter-mingling of plants and ani-

mals from the Indomalayan and Palearctic ecozones. The main forest types include *Dodonaea* scrub, subtropical dry evergreen forests of *Olea cuspidata*, northern dry mixed deciduous forests, dry Siwalik sal (*Shorea robusta*) forests, moist mixed deciduous forests, subtropical broadleaf wet hill forests, northern tropical semi-evergreen forests, and northern tropical wet evergreen forests. This eco-region extends up from Sewak Road to Rangpo and some distance beyond. We drove through the area taking in the Beauty of the landscape carved out by the Teesta but due to a paucity of time we hardly birded in the area.

At one point where we stopped to answer the call of nature we realised we were in the presence of Common Hill Mynas almost at eye level. The Common Hill Myna is supposed to be a very good mimic and is in great demand in the pet trade, this results in trapping, the net result is a sharp decline in population of the species living in the wild.

We crossed the Tiger Bridge well in time, and started

driving at birding pace for which we found many common birds we were familiar with.



Barred Cuckoo Dove

were rewarded with sightings of Black-crested Bulbul, Grey-backed



Black-faced Laughingthrush

Shrike, Indian Roller, Himalayan and Red-vented Bulbul and other com-

We finally winged our way to Delhi from Bagdogra and courtesy our Jat brethren, had to fly from Delhi to Chandigarh as well (Which did burn a hole in our pockets.) As we were waiting at Delhi Airport and reflecting on the past few days, exhaustion finally creeping into our bones we felt the trip was well worth it, in fact we all felt 'Yeh Dil Mange More.'

Note it is worth hiring a Cab through Sikkim Tourism Vehicle Service. **Contact** - 03592203960, +91 97-75-901379, +91 95-93-272738, +91 98-74-063659, +91 99-33-013474 **email** - stdcsikkim@yahoo.co.in

SIKKIM BIRD LIST

-
- A black bird with a white beak is perched on a branch, surrounded by large red flowers. The bird has a white patch around its eye and a white beak. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green.

Maroon Oriole

46. Magpie, Common Green
47. Magpie, Red-billed Blue
48. Minivet, Short-billed
49. Minla, Blue-winged
50. Minla, Red-tailed
51. Myna, Common
52. Myna, Hill
53. Niltava, Large
54. Niltava, Rufous-bellied
55. Niltava, Small
56. Nuthatch, White-tailed
57. Oriole, Maroon
58. Owlet, Asian Barred
59. Parrotbill, Black-throated
60. Pheasant, Kalij
61. Piculet, Speckled
62. Pigeon, Mountain Imperial
63. Pigeon, Rock
64. Pigeon, Snow
65. Pipit, Olive-backed
66. Prinia, Black-throated
67. Redstart, Black
68. Redstart, Blue-fronted
69. Redstart, Plumbeous



Kalij Pheasant (*Lophura leucomelanos*)
rumped

70. Redstart, White-capped
71. Rockthrush, Chestnut-bellied
72. Rosefinch, Dark-breasted
73. Rosefinch, White-browed
74. Shortwing, Lesser
75. Shrike, Brown
76. Shrike, Long-tailed
77. Sibia, Rufous
78. Snowfinch, White-rumped
79. Sparrow, Eurasian Tree
80. Sparrow, House
81. Sparrow, Russet
82. Sunbird, Fire-tailed
83. Sunbird, Green-tailed
84. Swallow, Barn
85. Swallow, Red-
86. Thrush, Blue Whistling
87. Thrush, Long-billed
88. Thrush, Scaly
89. Tit, Black-throated
90. Tit, Green-backed
91. Tit, Rufous-vented
92. Treecreeper, Sikkim

- 93. Treepie, Grey
- 94. Treepie, Rufous
- 95. Vulture, Himalayan
- 96. Wagtail, Grey
- 97. Warbler, Ashy-throated
- 98. Warbler, Grey-hooded
- 99. Warbler, White-spectacled
- 100. Woodpecker, Bay
- 101. Woodpecker, Darjeeling
- 102. Wren, Winter
- 103. Yuhina, Black-chinned
- 104. Yuhina, Rufous-vented
- 105. Yuhina, Stripe-throated
- 106. Yuhina, Whiskered



Large Niltava



Rufous-winged Fulvetta

Schedule of Events for April

- ◆ Saturday, April 2nd, 2016
— Chandigarh Bird Club meeting.
- ◆ Sunday, April 10th, 2016
— Bird Walk

Schedule of Events for May

- ◆ Saturday, May 7th, 2016
— Chandigarh Bird Club meeting.
- ◆ Sunday, May 15th, 2016
— Bird Walk

Schedule of Events for June

- ◆ Saturday, June 4th, 2016
— Chandigarh Bird Club meeting.
- ◆ Sunday, June 12th, 2016
— Bird Walk

WHISPERING WINGS®



**NEWSLETTER FOR THE
CHANDIGARH BIRD CLUB**

Incepted in 2008, the Chandigarh Bird Club has been dedicated to its goal of protecting the environment. The Club owes its existence to those few dedicated and expert members, who started this club in the Chandigarh Boat Club, namely, Navjit Singh, Narbir Kahlon, Vikramjeet Singh, Mrs. Rima Dhillon, Mrs. Sarbjeet and Mrs. Geeta Goswami.

The Basic objective of the Chandigarh Bird Club continues to be to:

- Bring people specially the younger generation closer to nature through birding and help them to enjoy the outdoors while making it a fun activity
- To make people and government more sensitive towards the environment to create a dynamic database for analysis in order to focus conservation efforts.
- To create a forum for birders to share information and discuss issues related to this activity