

Whispering Wings®

Newsletter of the Chandigarh Bird Club®

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Front Cover - Indian Peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*) by Gurjeet Virk

From the Editor's Desk

Rima Dhillon



In every returning wingbeat lies the start of another nesting story.

By March, the season begins to change. There is a subtle shift in the air. While migrant waterfowl begin to return to their breeding grounds in the Arctic regions, here in India, our own altitudinal migrants return to their nesting sites. Indian Golden Orioles, Indian Paradise Flycatchers, Indian Pittas, along with several resident species, begin their nesting season. Gardens resonate with the songs and serenades of courtship. In hedges, bushes, trees, and creepers, nests begin to take shape, unnoticed and often vulnerable. In many parts of the world, trimming of hedges and pruning of trees is discouraged during this period to protect nests and broods. In the UK, under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, it is a criminal offence to intentionally destroy or damage a wild bird's nest while it is in use or being built.

In India, while the awareness about wildlife and habitats is growing, these practices are yet to become part of our everyday thinking. As birdwatchers, gardeners, and observers of the natural world, we are uniquely placed not just to witness but to safeguard, by bringing about awareness — starting with our family, neighbours, and friends. Allow the gardens to breathe without interference from April to late May, and watch the new avian generation come forth.

As usual, members of Chandigarh Bird Club have been travelling to all corners of the country for birding and twitching throughout the winter months. We are grateful for the articles and trip reports in which they share their experiences. As always, articles by Subhash Sapru on techniques of photography are extremely informative and helpful.

I thank all the members for their continued contributions towards making Whispering Wings an interesting and informative read.

Secretary's Report

Amandeep Singh Channa



The first quarter of 2026 has been a flurry of activity for Chandigarh Bird Club and its members. The months of January, February, and March, which correspond to the second half of Poh (ਪੋਹ), Magh (ਮਾਘ), Phaggon (ਫੱਗਣ), and the first half of Chet (ਚੇਤ) in the Punjabi calendar, are the months when winter is at its peak and is gradually waning away. This usually means a high of winter migrants in Chandigarh and its surroundings.



Northern Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*), in Palheri

In January, members of the Chandigarh Bird Club participated in various avian censuses conducted by WWF-India in Harike and Keshopur. Members also

participated in the Asian Waterfowl Census during the first three weeks of January, in Sukhna, Motemajra, Siswan, and Dhanas. However, the most delightful event of January came in a newly discovered birding place, the village of Palheri, when a Northern Lapwing was reported to be seen in the pond. In the middle of January, the Club's monthly field trip was taken to Dagshai. The Club also took the students of Blossom School, Patiala, for a field trip to Siswan Dam.



CBC Members conducting the Asian Waterfowl Census at Sukhna Lake

February, as has been the case for the last decade and a half, is one of our busiest months, as we prepare for the annual Chandigarh Bird Race. This year, the jubilant mood was tinged with sadness at the absence of Sunjoy Monga, the man behind the idea



CBC takes a field trip of Blossom School to Siswan

of BirdRaces across India, who had passed away last year. This BirdRace was a memorial to his achievements in the field of conservation and his long association with our club. As a mark of respect, we suspended our usual awards and celebrated the participants

themselves, by awarding their photographic skills, their humour, and their zeal. The Club took students of Dalhousie Public School, Siswan, on a field trip to Siswan.



BirdRace Pre-event at CBC President's residence

In March, the Club's monthly field trip was taken to Chakki ka Morh. March is also the month when we celebrate World Sparrow Day. As usual, the Club raised awareness about the falling number of sparrows in Chandigarh, as it always does all year round.



BirdRace Post-event at CBC President's residence

In conclusion, this quarter has been a flurry of activity, and bodes well for the coming quarter, even as the weather turns warmer.

Happy Birding.

A Bird and a Photographer

Subhash Sapru

The symbiotic relationship between avians and mankind has significantly influenced their lives. Birds have always been a part of the legends and folklore of different cultures all over the world. Their songs and the magnificent beauty of their feathers have inspired human imagination, which for many mingles them with divine intervention. Also, for many, they not only give flight to human emotions and creativity but also caution about impending doom, if any. The fact cannot be ignored that some of the technological inventions that we enjoy today have been inspired by birds.

Today, for many urban dwellers, a bird may often be regarded as a nuisance, but those who are avid bird watchers and bird photographers keenly observe the behaviour of birds and appreciate even crows and ravens for their intelligence. It's due to the growing influence of avians in our social aspects that the nursery rhyme 'one for sorrow and two for joy' and the warning of bad luck signalled by a single magpie reflect our attitude to the conflictual relationship with birds. Some would agree that there appears to be an element of disrespect for birds in the language we use today. We have some unacceptable connotations like 'a bird-brain' (a silly person), 'for the birds' (a matter of no consequence or something unimportant), and even 'killing two birds with one stone' are examples of contempt in our language.

Many nature lovers believe that such an attitude influenced by myths, legends, and practices is largely to be blamed for birds not getting the desired prominence in photography. Thanks to the bird clubs, as they are not only changing the attitude of people by generating awareness about birds but are also helping creative minds to explore more about avians and to hone their skill as observers of their behaviour and record it in photographs.

Bird photography is a genre which requires precise skills and boundless practice. The invention of photography may date back to the early 19th century, but bird photography gained ground only after the vibrant colours and fascinating lines of their profile began to draw the attention of bird lovers. The advent of cell phone cameras and social media helped professional photographers as well as enthusiasts in developing an interest in birds. Although fascinated by their shapes, colours, and texture of any plumage captured in a fraction of a second, it's appreciable that there has also been greater emphasis on conservation issues through photography.

Today, a good number of wildlife professionals specialise in making photos of birds. Also, there are those who can be simply termed as beholders because they point their camera whenever and wherever their camera takes them. There is another class of bird photographers who would prefer to first see the bird with their binoculars before

making its photo. For them, colours and lines of birds are a feast for their eyes. Over the years, wildlife photographers have reached such a level of skill that makes birds flag bearers, and no small wonder that they might almost be mistaken for seasoned actors on stage, with twigs and the lighting fine-tuned to capture a stunning photo. Thanks to the technological advancements and wisdom of camera manufacturers who now add a bird mode in their cameras so as to enable photographers to shoot birds with precision.

Gone are the days when birds used to be a rare subject for photographers, mainly due to the limitation of making photos only in monochrome, which could not do justice to the fabulous colouration of birds. No one had even dreamed of photographing birds in colour. Therefore, despite this disadvantage, the photographers did not stop focusing on flowers. They laid emphasis on contrast and tonal variation. Also, due to a lack of technology, they were ill-equipped in capturing the rapid movements of birds. The advantage for photographers was that the flowers did not force them to camouflage themselves while capturing their close-ups.

If we look back, the idea of photographing a moving or flying bird used to be a technical challenge, but nowadays, the movement of birds can easily be frozen. This aspect of photography is an asset not only for an artistic pursuit but also crucial in developing scientific understanding of nature and a way to observe and document birds in their natural environment without harming them. Advancement in photography has opened new vistas of hope and aspiration for not only bird photographers but also ornithologists, conservationists, and wildlife enthusiasts.

The fact cannot be ignored that human brains are finely tuned to see human portraits reflecting behaviour, personality, expressions, and emotions. Interestingly, similar aspects are seen in portraits of birds. There are those who create a staged environment to welcome real birds and observe them in their studio-like settings, having special backdrops, and birds are considered as characters on a stage. A question arises: is a bird a model, source of inspiration, or an accessory for photography?

Although many bird photographers go out with ideas about what to look for, many seldom understand how to seek. Today, photographers make use of not only state-of-the-art technologies, drones, GPS, night vision devices, powerful binoculars, monoculars, and all that is available in the digital world, including artificial intelligence.

Some photographers have an unflinching curiosity to photograph species of their choice, or the one never seen before, to which many emphatically call 'lifers'. Despite so much technological advancement, there are still areas which need to be explored to better understand the life of avians. There are flight paths of birds that are invisible to the naked eye. I am reminded of the Spanish photographer, Xavi Bou, who revealed flight paths that are invisible to the naked eye, by combining multiple photographs into a single image in his series Orthographies.

Wildlife photographers follow a strict ethical code of conduct, and travel to places that limit disturbances, and they avoid manipulations. Many of them develop an extensive knowledge of the terrain of a specific area as well as the behaviour of the birds they set out to photograph. There are those who are contented with photographing birds in their immediate surroundings. Also, there are those who travel to remote areas in search of specific species. It's not because forests are shrinking due to rapid urbanisation, thus forcing the birds to adapt to new surroundings. In the recent past, there were reports in the media about some bird lovers making bird-friendly concrete structures to facilitate shelters for birds.

This reminds me of the definition of "Nature" by some prestigious international photographic organisations like the Fédération Internationale de l'Art Photographique, or FIAP (Eng: The International Federation of Photographic Art) and the Photographic Society of America (PSA) which state:

"Nature photography records all branches of natural history except anthropology and archaeology. This includes all aspects of the physical world, both above water and underwater. Nature images must convey the truth of the scene. A well-informed person should be able to identify the subject of the image and be satisfied that it has been presented honestly and that no unethical practices have been used to control the subject or capture the image. Images that directly or indirectly show any human activity threatening a living organism's life or welfare are not allowed."

"The most important part of a nature image is the nature story it tells. High technical standards are expected, and the image must look natural. Objects created by humans, and evidence of human activity, are allowed in nature images only when they are a necessary part of the nature story. Photographs of human-created hybrid plants, cultivated plants, feral animals, domesticated animals, human-created hybrid animals, and mounted or preserved zoological specimens are not allowed."

"Photographs made where the scene is natural and the animal is unharmed in a carefully managed environment, such as zoos, rescue centres, and ethically managed natural environment farms, are permitted."

"Attracting or controlling subjects through the use of food or sound for the purpose of photographing them is not allowed. Maintained situations such as providing supplemental food due to hardship caused by weather conditions or other conditions beyond the animals' control, where photography is incidental to the feeding of the animal, do not fall under this provision."

"Controlling live subjects by chilling, anaesthetic, or any other method of restricting natural movement for a photograph is not allowed."

"Human-made elements shall be permitted under the following circumstances:

- (a) *When they are an integral part of the nature story, such as a songbird singing atop a fence post, a man-made object used as nest material, or a weather phenomenon destroying a man-made structure.”*
- (b) *When they are a small, but unavoidable part of the scene, such as an unobtrusive footprint or track in the background.*
- (c) *Scientific tags, collars, and bands are specifically allowed.”*

The definition further states, *“When photographing at a zoo, sanctuary, or rehabilitation centre, it would be construed that the photographer ensured that it’s properly accredited and conforms to best practices.” “For wildlife photography, the definition states: “In addition to the restrictions on nature photography, to be eligible for any wildlife award, images must meet the following conditions:*

- (a) *Zoological organisms must be living free and unrestrained in a natural habitat of their own choosing.*
- (b) *Images of zoological organisms that have been removed from their natural habitat, are in any form of captivity, or are being controlled by humans for the purpose of photography are not allowed.*
- (c) *Botanical organisms may not be removed from their natural environment for the purpose of photography.*
- (d) *Images that have been staged for the purpose of photography are not allowed.”*

“Nature Editing Guidelines: Processing or editing must be limited to making the image look as close to the original scene as possible, except that conversion to grayscale monochrome is allowed.”

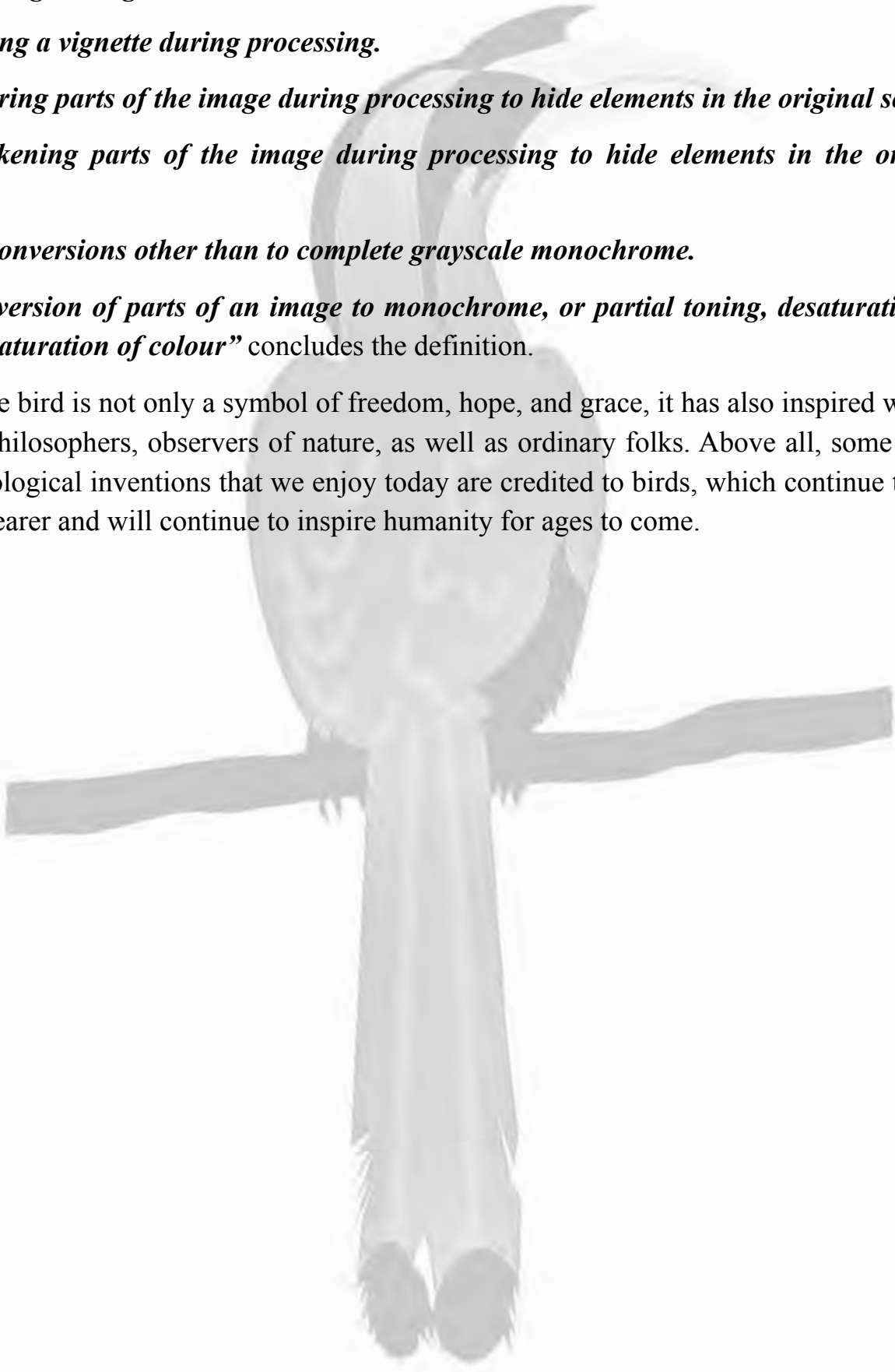
“Allowed editing techniques:

- *Cropping, straightening and perspective correction.*
- *Removal or correction of elements added by the camera or lens, such as dust spots, noise, chromatic aberration and lens distortion.*
- *Global and selective adjustments such as brightness, hue, saturation and contrast to restore the appearance of the original scene.*
- *Complete conversion of colour images to grayscale monochrome.*
- *Blending of multiple images of the same subject and combining them in camera or with software (exposure blending or focus stacking)*
- *Image stitching – combining multiple images with overlapping fields of view that are taken consecutively (panoramas).”*

“Editing techniques that are not allowed:

- ***Removing, adding to, moving, or changing any part of an image, except for cropping and straightening.***
- ***Adding a vignette during processing.***
- ***Blurring parts of the image during processing to hide elements in the original scene.***
- ***Darkening parts of the image during processing to hide elements in the original scene.***
- ***All conversions other than to complete grayscale monochrome.***
- ***Conversion of parts of an image to monochrome, or partial toning, desaturation, or over-saturation of colour”*** concludes the definition.

The bird is not only a symbol of freedom, hope, and grace, it has also inspired writers, philosophers, observers of nature, as well as ordinary folks. Above all, some of the technological inventions that we enjoy today are credited to birds, which continue to be a flag bearer and will continue to inspire humanity for ages to come.



Kalchuria: The Blue Whistling Thrush

A Kamouni Folktale

Mitinderpal Singh Sekhon

Once, in the serene Binsar Valley of Kumaon, there lived a notoriously unruly youth who became the torment of every young maiden in the region. Wherever he went, he whistled at them, passed crude remarks, and sang indecent songs. His relentless harassment grew so unbearable that the girls of the valley began avoiding stepping out of their homes.

Tasks that once fetching water cattle, or visiting the through feigned illnesses and mysterious indispositions did

An elderly matriarch amiss. With a mixture she persuaded her the truth. Once the matter came with her son, who was consumed wished to behead the offender. boy was the son of the *Daroga*, who held the entire valley—and direct action was

Left with little choice, the Land resolved to seek *Jagar*—a ritual oracle session to invoke the spirit of the local spirit descended upon the *Dangaria*, the priest its medium. The deity assured the villagers that justice would instructed the priest accordingly.

The following week marked the annual village fair. People from nearby hamlets joined the festivities in the temple courtyard. A goat was sacrificed, and the atmosphere brimmed with celebration. Villagers donned their finest attire, while stalls displayed sweets, savoury treats, flowers, handicrafts, and cloth.

Amidst the merriment, the rowdy youth appeared—unabashed as ever. He resumed his whistling and crude teasing, making the young maidens shrink in embarrassment. He snatched a jasmine garland from a frightened girl and placed it around his own neck. From another stall, he grabbed a handful of *ladoos*.

formed part of their daily routine—from the spring, gathering fodder for weekly market—were now evaded invented ailments. These sudden and not go unnoticed.

sensed that something was of sternness and affection, granddaughter to reveal to light, she shared it with rage and However, the authority over not possible.

villagers gathered divine justice. A —was performed deity. Soon, the who served as be served and



The priest approached him quietly and said, “Go to the stream—some girls are bathing there.”

Enticed by the prospects, the boy hurried to the stream. Parting the bushes, he beheld a girl of extraordinary beauty bathing in the water. Unable to restrain himself, he whistled. The girl looked up and beckoned him with a subtle gesture.

Overcome with excitement, he stepped into the stream. In that instant, the girl transformed into the deity. The Devta seized him by the neck, stuffed his mouth with the *ladooos* he held, and turned him into a blue-black bird. His beak became yellow, stained by the sweets that filled his mouth.

It is said that his descendants still flit near mountain streams—blue-black in colour, with yellow beaks and a pale marking around their necks like a garland which appears in spring. They whistle mournfully, forever searching for the deity to seek forgiveness. The locals call them *Kalchuria*. And thus, the Blue Whistling Thrush came into being.

(As narrated to me by the grandmother of the homestay owner in Binsar.)



Chandu Wetland: An Experience Beyond Sightings



I have been birding since 2019 and am also a member of the Chandigarh Bird Club. My birding journeys have largely revolved around Chandigarh and its surrounding areas. Over the years, I was fortunate to document nearly 290 bird species. However, by 2024, the number seemed to have plateaued—adding new species had become increasingly difficult.



With time, a quiet desire began to grow—to explore beyond familiar landscapes. Watching fellow birders share their sightings from distant wetlands and new habitats often sparked a sense of longing. Among all such aspirations, one dream stood out distinctly: to see and photograph a flamingo.

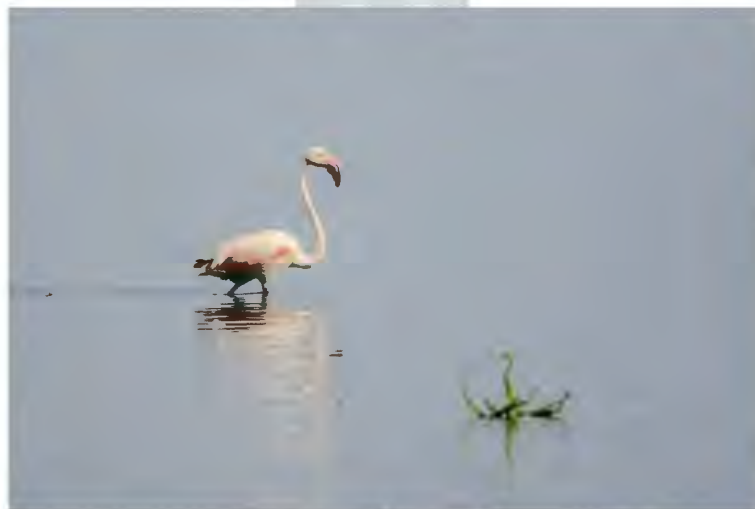


For a birder based in Chandigarh, this was no easy expectation. In November 2024, I came across reports of flamingo sightings at Chandu Wetland. Without hesitation, I contacted a birder friend and planned a visit. We gathered early in the morning at Sri Burfiwala on Chandu Road—a group of six birders, all driven by the same passion. The excitement was palpable. For nearly three hours, we explored the wetland. There were lifers, beautiful sightings, and great photographic opportunities—but my eyes were searching for just one bird, “The Flamingo”.



Clamorous Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus stentoreus*)

There was uncertainty among the group about whether we would be lucky enough. But birding, as we know, often rewards persistence in the most unexpected moments. At around 9 a.m., a fellow birder spotted it—a lone flamingo standing far away. In that instant, everything else faded. I rushed out, camera in hand, and captured the moment without delay. There was a quiet fear that even a second’s hesitation might cost me this opportunity.



Lesser Flamingo (*Phoeniconaias minor*)

And just like that, a long-cherished dream was fulfilled. Interestingly, despite several lifers during the visit, it was only after seeing the flamingo that I truly began to absorb and enjoy everything around me. That single sighting transformed the entire experience.

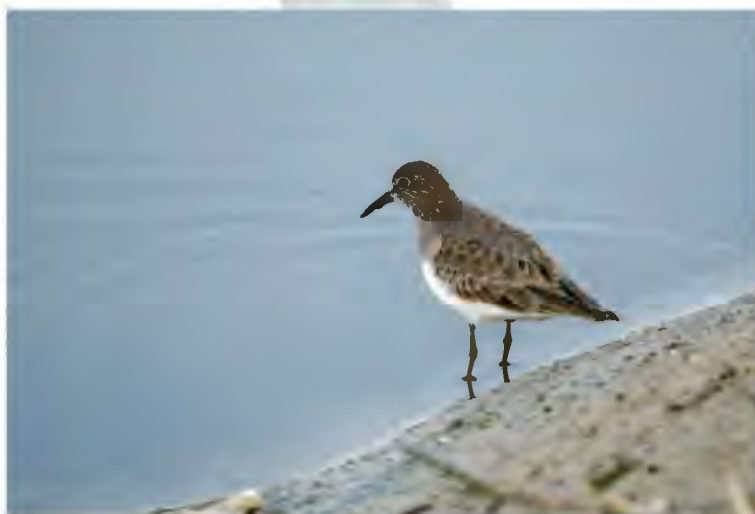
As they say, “*Ye Dil Maange More.*” The experience left me wanting to return—not just for better photographs of the flamingos, but also to explore more of what Chandu had to offer.

That opportunity came soon. I revisited the wetland in December 2024 and again in January 2025.



Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*)

Though these were shorter visits, each lasting just an hour or two, they proved immensely rewarding. This time, the wetland unfolded in greater detail.



Temminck's Stint (*Calidris temminckii*)

Flamingos were there—but so were Pied Avocets, Kentish Plovers, Marsh Sandpipers, Redshanks, Painted Storks, Gulls, Glossy Ibises, and Greylag Geese. The diversity and richness of life were simply remarkable.



Kentish Plover (*Anarhynchus alexandrinus*)

Each visit added not just species to my list, but depth to my understanding of wetland ecosystems.

Another visit in November 2025 revealed yet another dimension of Chandu Wetland. Birding often tests patience. There are days when hours pass for a single sighting. And then, there are days that redefine everything.



At Chandu, I experienced the latter. At places like Mote Mazra, spotting even one Black-tailed Godwit can demand patience and luck. But here, the sky seemed alive with them. Flocks rose together, circled, and settled—transforming the wetland into a dynamic canvas of motion and sound.

You stop searching for birds—and begin searching for moments. Moments where light, movement, and instinct align.



A similar scene unfolded with the Pied Avocets. Though they stood quietly in the shallow waters, their numbers stretched far beyond what the eye could comfortably count. A calm gathering, yet overwhelmingly grand.



Not every story at Chandu Wetland is about massive flocks. Some stories are quieter—and just as special. Like this pair of **Brown-headed Gulls** in flight, one carrying prey, offered dramatic frames.



Brown-headed Gull (*Chroicocephalus brunnicephalus*)

The wetland was alive with activity. A group of **Ruff** also caught my attention. The flock was not as large as the Godwits seen here, but seeing this species in good numbers was truly satisfying. In the Tricity region, Ruff is not a bird you come across easily, and spotting even a few individuals often feels rewarding.



Ruff (*Calidris pugnax*)

Among quieter highlights were sightings of other species like Bar-headed Goose, Wood Sandpiper, Temminck's Stint, River Tern, Glossy Ibis, and Black-headed Ibis.

Another memorable visit came in January. It was a short early morning outing—but one that left a lasting impression.

The highlight was the sighting of a Pied Kingfisher. Against calm, mirror-like water reflecting the blue sky, the bird appeared almost unreal—poised, focused, and perfectly integrated into its surroundings. For a brief moment, time seemed to pause.



Pied Kingfisher (*Ceryle rudis*)

As if this was not enough, the visit gifted me a lifer—the Eurasian Curlew, instantly recognisable by its long, down-curved bill. Watching it and capturing a few frames was deeply satisfying.



Eurasian Curlew (*Numenius arquata*)

Some black-headed gulls were also there in a generous mood—offering close-ups, elegant flight shots, and endless opportunities to capture their beauty.



Black-headed Ibis (*Threskiornis melanocephalus*)

Black-headed Ibises added elegance, while species like Barn Swallows, River Terns, and Sandpipers completed the vibrant scene.

Conclusion: Beyond Birding

Chandu Wetland is not just a birding destination—it is an experience. It transforms birding from a pursuit of rarity into a celebration of abundance. From waiting for one bird to being surrounded by hundreds. From checklist-driven outings to moments of connection with nature. Each visit brings something different—sometimes patience, sometimes surprise, and sometimes pure magic.



Brown-headed Gull (*Chroicocephalus brunnicephalus*)



For me, Chandu Wetland was where a dream came true—but more importantly, it became a place that reshaped how I experience birding.

And that, perhaps, is its greatest gift.

Pin-tailed Parrotfinch

Our Discovery of the Pin-tailed Parrotfinch: First Record for Arunachal and Second for India

Bhupesh Kumar Goyal

In early January this year, we embarked on a trip to the Vijoynagar-Gandhigram area of Arunachal Pradesh for the Lisu Wren Babbler. The 118 km long drive from Miao to Gandhigram passes through Namdapha National Park, a well-known birding hotspot. The road is almost non-existent and only a 4x4 vehicle can negotiate this back-breaking track.



Our day at Gandhigram was very productive. We not only clocked the target Wren Babbler rather easily, we also got a big flock of White-cheeked Starlings and a Richard's Pipit.

We started our return journey early the next morning and kept stopping on the way to look for the White-bellied Heron in the Noa Dehing River that flows all along the track. At the 62nd milestone, while searching for the Heron, Binanda Hatibaruah, our guide, heard the call of the Rufous-headed Parrotbill and we started looking out for it. Just above our heads, we noticed a flock of White-rumped Munias, a rather common bird in this area, feeding on a flowering bamboo branch. When I looked up at the flock of munias, I was intrigued to find two orange-red birds towards the end of the flowering branch, feeding alongside the munias. I asked Binanda if there are any Minivets in this area. He answered in the negative. Then I asked him to see what was up there. He looked through his binoculars and got really excited. "Kheencho, kheencho, kuchh naya hai!" he said, and rushed to get his own camera from the car. All of us got into a shooting frenzy and soon Merlin app helped us identify this unusual colour bomb as the Pin-tailed Parrotfinch. We were ECSTATIC. We thought we had discovered something new for India. Subsequently, however, we learnt that this species had been first sighted and

reported in April 2025 in Mizoram. Ours was the first record for Arunachal and second for India.



Pin-tailed Parrotfinch (*Erythrura prasina*)

There were two males and two females of this species, all feeding aggressively on the bamboo flowers, like the munias. They stayed on that flowering branch for nearly 30 minutes before moving on.

Dr Vinod Kumar Gupta from Delhi and Mistu Basu from Siliguri were the other two birders in the group that made the historic discovery of the Parrotfinch.



Pin-tailed Parrotfinch (*Erythrura prasina*)

This species is usually found in many South-East Asian countries such as Borneo, Indonesia, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Malaysia, and Thailand and has been seen as far west as Myanmar. In April 2025, the first photographic record of this species for India

was made in Reiek, Mizoram, where it was found feeding on bamboo flowers along with munias, just like in our sighting.

It has been described as a ‘ghost bird’ by eBird. It suddenly appears in large flocks when the paddy harvest or bamboo flowering is ready, devours the crops or the bamboo flowers, and then vanishes. Only to make its appearance again when the situation turns favourable.

The male of this beautiful species is leaf green in colour with a blue face and reddish belly. The tail is long and pointed, giving it an overall size of 15 cm. The female, in comparison, has a faded blue face and faded green upper parts and lacks any red colour in the belly. With a shorter tail, it is about 12 cm in size.



Pin-tailed Parrotfinch (*Erythrura prasina*)

Subsequent to the original sighting on 6th January 2026, at least half a dozen other groups have visited Namdapha National Park for this rarity and have unfailingly found the bird feeding exactly at the same location, even more than a month after the initial sighting.

With more and more people taking up birding as a hobby, more eyes are looking out for birds. As a result, more and more new species are being added to Indian avifauna at a frenetic pace. These sure are fun times for birders in India.

Personally, I cannot thank Chandigarh Bird Club enough for initiating me into birding almost eleven years ago in April 2015. My life has become so much more colourful, so much more adventurous, and so much more exciting ever since.

Birdwatching Trip to Rajasthan

Sarbjeeet Kaur

It had long been my dream to visit Bharatpur for birding, and finally that dream came true when Geetanjali Kanwar, Coordinator at WWF, suggested that February would be the ideal time to visit. Rima wasted no time in finalising the dates and thoughtfully planned the trip, including Tal Chhapar as well.



17 February 2026:

Rima, Amandeep, Navjit, and I set off from Chandigarh at 6:30 a.m. for our much-awaited birding adventure. Rima, being an experienced driver for long journeys, was at the wheel of her Creta, while Amandeep shared the driving so that she could relax a little too. Navjit, as always, stayed away from driving on such long routes, and as for me, they never even let me touch the steering wheel!



Spotted Deer/Cheetal (*Axis axis*)

We reached Bharatpur at around 1:30 p.m. and checked into Sunbird Hotel, conveniently located on the highway close to Keoladeo National Park. After a quick lunch at the nearby Paradise Restaurant, we met Pritam Singh, an expert guide arranged once again by Geetanjali. He was waiting for us with his e-rickshaw, and soon we were on our way into the famous Keoladeo National Park.



Jungle Nightjar (*Caprimulgus indicus*)

The park is an extraordinary habitat, teeming with resident and migratory birds, along with many other forms of wildlife. We spent the evening birding till sunset, soaking in the beauty of the wetlands. Just before leaving, we were rewarded with the sight of a Jungle Nightjar, so perfectly camouflaged that it was incredibly difficult to spot. Even as we kept clicking photographs, it remained absolutely still, without even opening its eyes.

18 February 2026:

The next morning, we left early with packed breakfast for a safari beginning at 6:30 a.m., once again in the same e-rickshaw. It turned out to be a truly memorable birding session. Our day began wonderfully as we sighted a pair of Indian Scops Owls,



Bronze-winged Jacana (*Metopidius indicus*)

so beautifully camouflaged that they blended seamlessly with their surroundings. A little later, we spotted a flock of six to eight Cotton Pygmy Geese.



Cotton Pygmy Goose (*Nettapus coromandelianus*)

Pritam Singh proved once again what an exceptional guide he was, effortlessly spotting birds and wildlife that would otherwise have escaped our notice. After some time, we paused for tea and enjoyed our breakfast of sandwiches, boiled eggs, fruit, and juice. We also visited the old Keoladeo Shiva Temple inside the sanctuary.



Common Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*)

There was a slight drizzle for a while, but it only added to the charm of the morning and did not affect birding. One of the highlights of the day was seeing the large heronry, where countless Painted Storks were roosting on leafless trees. Some were even feeding their young, making it a truly fascinating sight. Another unforgettable highlight was the Pheasant-tailed Jacana. Almost every waterbody seemed to host two or

three of them, often alongside Bronze-winged Jacanas. We were also delighted to see a graceful pair of Sarus Cranes, and managed some very satisfying photographs.



Heronry

We continued birding till about 4:00 p.m. and then returned to the hotel for tea. Later, we drove into the city to visit the fort, which is located in the heart of Bharatpur. Reaching it meant driving through winding, narrow roads. Our real aim, however, was to enjoy some chaat. Sadly, that plan did not quite work out because parking space was nearly impossible to find. Eventually, after navigating the crowded lanes, we stopped at a rather dingy fast-food place and had chaat and panipuri, which turned out to be disappointingly tasteless. We returned to our rooms and later had dinner at KFC, conveniently located almost opposite the hotel.



Painted Stork (*Mycteria leucocephala*)



Pheasant-tailed Jacana (*Metopidius indicus*)



Sarus Crane (*Grus antizone*)

19 February 2026:

Since the Indian Skimmer would be a “Lifer” for all of us, we had planned a special visit to Rajghat on the Chambal River in Dholpur, about an hour and a half away. After checking out of Sunbird Hotel, the drive was extremely foggy, but thankfully we managed to reach on time. The boat had already been booked, and the guide, arranged by Geetanjali, was waiting for us.

The Chambal River Safari turned out to be a thrilling experience. As soon as we got into the boat, we spotted crocodiles and gharials, along with a few waders. A Great Thick-knee sat calmly on a small mound of stones and rubble. Then came the most

exciting moment of all - the sight of around 23 Indian Skimmers. There were also nearly as many Small Pratincoles, and we were lucky enough to get some excellent flight shots too. It was truly an unforgettable river safari.



Indian Skimmer (*Rynchops albicollis*)

We had to drive back to Sunbird Hotel in Bharatpur because Navjit had forgetfully left his tripod there. Once we collected it, we immediately began the eight-hour-long drive to Tal Chhapar. By the time we reached around 8:00 p.m., we were completely exhausted. We checked into Raptor's Homestay, which is run by our guides, Anand Prasad (+91 94137 24688) and Ravinder Prasad.

20 February 2026:

The homestay is located on the outskirts of the sanctuary, and the early morning air was filled with the sounds of different bird species. We set out in an open jeep at about 6:30 a.m.



Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse (*Pterocles exustus*)

Driving past the salt pans and sandy tracks, we spotted Larks, Black-headed Ibis, Wheatears, Long-legged Buzzards, and a particularly delightful sight—a desert fox cuddling its three pups. We also saw Painted Snipes, Vultures, and several other species. We then headed to an area beyond the sanctuary, in search of Painted Sandgrouse, which would be a Lifer for all of us.



Rufous-fronted Prinia (*Prinia buchanani*)

However, just as we reached there, I realised to my horror that my phone was missing. It had slipped out of my pocket somewhere along the way. Everyone felt bad for me, and I was truly panicky and upset. Even so, we stayed for a little while in search of the Painted Sandgrouse before deciding to return for breakfast and to try tracking the missing phone from my laptop.

On the way back, I gave my number to our guide, Anand Prasad, who dialled it. To our immense relief, the person who had found my phone answered and gave us his location, about 35 kilometres away. What a huge relief that was for all of us! After breakfast, our spirits lifted, and we resumed birding with renewed enthusiasm.

We saw more wheatears, a pair of spotted creepers, Egyptian vultures, and several other species. Although we did not manage to spot the painted sandgrouse that day, we decided to visit the same area the next morning before returning to Chandigarh.

Sadly, the habitat gets disturbed after 9:00 a.m., when workers start cutting the shrub-like acacia and shredding it on site, to supply the same to a brick kiln. Since it is private land, in all likelihood, this habitat will disappear within the next two years.

21 February 2026:

As planned, we checked out in the morning and, with luggage loaded, we drove to the same area once again to search for the painted sandgrouse. We had barely

begun scanning the tracks when Amandeep spotted one, sitting on the ground, beautifully camouflaged in the dry grass. It was a single bird, but for us, it was the moment we had all been hoping for. It truly felt like a dream come true. We managed some lovely photographs and also enjoyed observing it through our binoculars.



Painted Sandgrouse (*Pterocles indicus*)

Without doubt, it was a memorable birdwatching trip, full of wonderful sightings, exciting lifers, beautiful habitats, and moments that will stay with us for a long time.

Checklist:

Bharatpur

1. Ashy Prinia (*Prinia socialis*)
2. Asian Barn Owl (Eastern Barn Owl) (*Tyto javanica*)
3. Asian Woolly-necked Stork (*Ciconia episcopus*)
4. Bar-headed Goose (*Anser indicus*)
5. Black Bittern (*Botaurus flavicollis*)
6. Black Drongo (*Dicrurus macrocercus*)
7. Black Redstart (*Phoenicurus ochruros*)
8. Black-crowned Night Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*)
9. Black-headed Ibis (*Threskiornis melanocephalus*)
10. Black-necked Stork (*Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus*)
11. Black-rumped Flameback (Lesser Goldenbacked Woodpecker) (*Dinopium benghalense*)
12. Black-winged Stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*)
13. Bluethroat (*Luscinia svecica*)
14. Brahminy Starling (*Sturnia pagodarum*)
15. Bronze-winged Jacana (*Metopidius indicus*)

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16. Citrine Wagtail (*Motacilla citreola*)
 17. Clamorous Reed Warbler (Indian Great Reed Warbler) (*Acrocephalus stentoreus*)
 18. Common Chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus collybita*)
 19. Common Kingfisher (Small Blue Kingfisher) (*Alcedo atthis*)
 20. Common Myna (*Acridotheres tristis*)
 21. Common Pochard (*Aythya ferina*)
 22. Common Snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*)
 23. Common Tailorbird (*Orthotomus sutorius*)
 24. Coppersmith Barbet (*Psilopogon haemacephalus*)
 25. Cotton Pygmy-Goose (Cotton Teal) (*Nettapus coromandelianus*)
 26. Dusky Eagle-Owl (*Ketupa coromanda*)
 27. Eastern Cattle-Egret (*Ardea coromanda*)
 28. Egyptian Vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*)
 29. Eurasian Collared-Dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*)
 30. Eurasian Coot (*Fulica atra*)
 31. Eurasian Kestrel (Common Kestrel) (*Falco tinnunculus*)
 32. Eurasian Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*)
 33. Eurasian Wigeon (*Mareca penelope*)
 34. Ferruginous Duck (Ferruginous Pochard) (*Aythya nyroca*)
 35. Gadwall (*Mareca strepera*)
 36. Garganey (*Spatula querquedula*)
 37. Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*)
 38. Great Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*)
 39. Great Egret (*Ardea alba*)
 40. Great White Pelican (Rosy Pelican) (*Pelecanus onocrotalus*)
 41. Greater Coucal (*Centropus sinensis*)
 42. Greater Spotted Eagle (*Clanga clanga*)
 43. Green Sandpiper (*Tringa ochropus*)
 44. Green-winged Teal (Common Teal) (*Anas crecca*)
 45. Grey Francolin (*Ortygornis pondicerianus*)
 46. Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*)
 47. Grey Wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*)
 48. Grey-headed Lapwing (*Vanellus cinereus*)
 49. Grey-headed Swamphen (Purple Swamphen) (*Porphyrio poliocephalus*)
 50. Greylag Goose (*Anser anser*)
 51. Hume's Warbler (*Phylloscopus humei*)
 52. Imperial Eagle (*Aquila heliaca*)
 53. Indian Golden Oriole (*Oriolus kundoo*)
 54. Indian Grey Hornbill (*Ocyrceros birostris*)
 55. Indian Peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*)

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56. Indian Pied Starling (Pied Myna) (*Gracupica contra*)
 57. Indian Pond-Heron (*Ardeola grayii*)
 58. Indian Robin (*Copsychus fulicatus*)
 59. Indian Scops-Owl (Collared Scops-Owl) (*Otus bakkamoena*)
 60. Indian Spot-billed Duck (*Anas poecilorhyncha*)
 61. Jungle Babbler (*Argya striata*)
 62. Jungle Nightjar (Indian Jungle Nightjar) (*Caprimulgus indicus*)
 63. Knob-billed Duck (Comb Duck) (*Sarkidiornis melanotos*)
 64. Laughing Dove (Little Brown Dove) (*Spilopelia senegalensis*)
 65. Lesser Whitethroat (*Curruca curruca*)
 66. Little Cormorant (*Microcarbo niger*)
 67. Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*)
 68. Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*)
 69. Little Stint (*Calidris minuta*)
 70. Marsh Sandpiper (*Tringa stagnatilis*)
 71. Northern Pintail (*Anas acuta*)
 72. Northern Shoveler (*Spatula clypeata*)
 73. Oriental Darter (*Anhinga melanogaster*)
 74. Oriental Magpie-Robin (*Copsychus saularis*)
 75. Oriental Turtle-Dove (*Streptopelia orientalis*)
 76. Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*)
 77. Paddyfield Pipit (*Anthus rufulus*)
 78. Painted Stork (*Mycteria leucocephala*)
 79. Pheasant-tailed Jacana (*Hydrophasianus chirurgus*)
 80. Pied Bushchat (*Saxicola caprata*)
 81. Pied Kingfisher (*Ceryle rudis*)
 82. Plain Prinia (*Prinia inornata*)
 83. Purple Heron (*Ardea purpurea*)
 84. Red Collared-Dove (Red Turtle-Dove) (*Streptopelia tranquebarica*)
 85. Red-breasted Flycatcher (*Ficedula parva*)
 86. Red-crested Pochard (*Netta rufina*)
 87. Red-vented Bulbul (*Pycnonotus cafer*)
 88. Red-wattled Lapwing (*Vanellus indicus*)
 89. Rock Pigeon (Feral Pigeon) (*Columba livia*)
 90. Rose-ringed Parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*)
 91. Ruddy Shelduck (Brahminy Duck) (*Tadorna ferruginea*)
 92. Rufous Treepie (*Dendrocitta vagabunda*)
 93. Sarus Crane (*Antigone antigone*)
 94. Shikra (*Tachyspiza badia*)
 95. Steppe Eagle (*Aquila nipalensis*)

96. Western Marsh Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*)
97. Western Yellow Wagtail (*Motacilla flava*)
98. White Wagtail (*Motacilla alba*)
99. White-breasted Waterhen (*Amaurornis phoenicurus*)
100. White-eared Bulbul (*Pycnonotus leucotis*)
101. White-tailed Lapwing (*Vanellus leucurus*)
102. White-throated Kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*)
103. Wire-tailed Swallow (*Hirundo smithii*)
104. Wood Sandpiper (*Tringa glareola*)
105. Yellow-eyed Babbler (*Chrysomma sinense*)
106. Yellow-footed Green-Pigeon (*Treron phoenicopterus*)
107. Yellow-throated Sparrow (Chestnut-shouldered Petronia) (*Gymnoris xanthocollis*)

Chambal River

1. Bar-headed Goose (*Anser indicus*)
2. Black-bellied Tern (*Sterna acuticauda*)
3. Black-winged Stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*)
4. Coppersmith Barbet (*Psilopogon haemacephalus*)
5. Eastern Cattle-Egret (*Ardea coromanda*)
6. Eurasian Collared-Dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*)
7. Great Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*)
8. Great Egret (*Ardea alba*)
9. Great Thick-knee (Great Stone-curlew) (*Esacus recurvirostris*)
10. House Crow (*Corvus splendens*)
11. House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*)
12. Indian Peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*)
13. Indian Skimmer (*Rynchops albicollis*)
14. Little Cormorant (*Microcarbo niger*)
15. Pied Kingfisher (*Ceryle rudis*)
16. Red-vented Bulbul (*Pycnonotus cafer*)
17. Red-wattled Lapwing (*Vanellus indicus*)
18. River Lapwing (*Vanellus duvaucelii*)
19. River Tern (*Sterna aurantia*)
20. Rock Pigeon (Feral Pigeon) (*Columba livia*)
21. Rose-ringed Parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*)
22. Small Pratincole (*Glareola lactea*)
23. White-browed Wagtail (Large Pied Wagtail) (*Motacilla cinerea*)
24. Wire-tailed Swallow (*Hirundo smithii*)

Tal Chhappar

1. Asian Green Bee-eater (*Merops orientalis*)

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2. Bay-backed Shrike (*Lanius vittatus*)
 3. Black Drongo (*Dicrurus macrocercus*)
 4. Black Francolin (*Francolinus francolinus*)
 5. Black Redstart (*Phoenicurus ochruros*)
 6. Black-winged Kite (Black-shouldered Kite) (*Elanus caeruleus*)
 7. Booted Eagle (*Hieraaetus pennatus*)
 8. Brown Rock Chat (*Oenanthe fusca*)
 9. Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse (*Pterocles exustus*)
 10. Cinereous Vulture (*Aegypius monachus*)
 11. Common Chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus collybita*)
 12. Common Hoopoe (*Upupa epops*)
 13. Common Redshank (*Tringa totanus*)
 14. Desert Wheatear (*Oenanthe deserti*)
 15. Eastern Cattle-Egret (*Ardea cinerea*)
 16. Eastern Orphean Warbler (*Curruca crassirostris*)
 17. Egyptian Vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*)
 18. Eurasian Collared-Dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*)
 19. Eurasian Kestrel (Common Kestrel) (*Falco tinnunculus*)
 20. Eurasian Spoonbill (*Platalea leucorodia*)
 21. Eurasian Wryneck (*Jynx torquilla*)
 22. Great Grey Shrike (*Lanius excubitor*)
 23. Greater Coucal (*Centropus sinensis*)
 24. Greater Painted-Snipe (*Rostratula benghalensis*)
 25. Greater Short-toed Lark (*Calandrella brachydactyla*)
 26. Green Sandpiper (*Tringa ochropus*)
 27. Grey Francolin (*Ortygornis pondicerianus*)
 28. Himalayan Griffon (Himalayan Vulture) (*Gyps himalayensis*)
 29. House Crow (*Corvus splendens*)
 30. House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*)
 31. Indian Peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*)
 32. Indian Pied Starling (Pied Myna) (*Gracupica contra*)
 33. Indian Robin (*Copsychus fulicatus*)
 34. Indian Roller (*Coracias benghalensis*)
 35. Indian Spot-billed Duck (*Anas poecilorhyncha*)
 36. Indian Spotted Creeper (*Salpornis spilonota*)
 37. Isabelline Shrike (*Lanius isabellinus*)
 38. Isabelline Wheatear (*Oenanthe isabellina*)
 39. Laggar Falcon (*Falco jugger*)
 40. Large Grey Babbler (*Argya malcolmi*)
 41. Laughing Dove (Little Brown Dove) (*Spilopelia senegalensis*)

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42. Lesser Whitethroat (*Curruca curruca*)
 43. Long-legged Buzzard (*Buteo rufinus*)
 44. Paddyfield Pipit (*Anthus rufulus*)
 45. Painted Sandgrouse (*Pterocles indicus*)
 46. Pallid Harrier (*Circus macrourus*)
 47. Pied Bushchat (*Saxicola caprata*)
 48. Plain Prinia (*Prinia inornata*)
 49. Red Collared-Dove (Red Turtle-Dove) (*Streptopelia tranquebarica*)
 50. Red-naped Ibis (Indian Black Ibis) (*Pseudibis papillosa*)
 51. Red-vented Bulbul (*Pycnonotus cafer*)
 52. Red-wattled Lapwing (*Vanellus indicus*)
 53. Rock Pigeon (Feral Pigeon) (*Columba livia*)
 54. Rose-ringed Parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*)
 55. Rosy Starling (*Pastor roseus*)
 56. Ruff (*Calidris pugnax*)
 57. Rufous-fronted Prinia (*Prinia buchanani*)
 58. Shikra (*Tachyspiza badia*)
 59. Short-eared Owl (*Asio flammeus*)
 60. Siberian Stonechat (Common Stonechat) (*Saxicola maurus*)
 61. Small Minivet (*Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*)
 62. Spotted Owlet (*Athene brama*)
 63. Steppe Eagle (*Aquila nipalensis*)
 64. Striated Babbler (*Argya earlei*)
 65. Tawny Pipit (*Anthus campestris*)
 66. White Wagtail (*Motacilla alba*)
 67. White-browed Fantail (*Rhipidura aureola*)
 68. White-browed Wagtail (Large Pied Wagtail) (*Motacilla maderaspatensis*)
 69. White-capped Bunting (Chestnut-breasted Bunting) (*Emberiza stewarti*)
 70. White-eared Bulbul (*Pycnonotus leucotis*)
 71. White-tailed Lapwing (*Vanellus leucurus*)
 72. White-throated Kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*)
 73. Yellow-footed Green-Pigeon (*Treron phoenicopterus*)

Birds in Love - Photographs by CBC Members

Common Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*),
by Anuj Jain



Rose-ringed Parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*),
by Gurbaksh Sandhu





Rima Dhillon



Sind Sparrow (*Passer pyrrhonotus*), by
Rima Dhillon



Gurjeet Virk

River Tern (*Sterna aurantia*) by Gurjeet Virk

Rose-ringed Parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*),
by Sarbjeet Kaur



Brahminy Starling (*Sturnia pagodarum*),
by Gurdip Singh Boparai



White-eyed Buzzard (*Butastur teesa*),
by Rajive Das



Indian Peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*),
by Vikas Sharma



Plum-headed Parakeet (*Psittacula cyanocephala*),
by Rajive Das



Jacobin Cuckoo (*Clamator jacobinus*),
by Rajive Das





Spotted Owlet (*Athene brama*),
by Grudip Singh Boparai



Plum-headed Parakeet (*Psittacula cyanocephala*),
by Neeraja



Himalayan Bulbul (*Pycnonotus leucogenys*),
by Neeraja



Northern Shoveler (*Spatula clypeata*),
by Vikas Sharma

Trip to the Nilgiris

In March, Sarbjeet Kaur and I decided to go on a trip to the Nilgiris in Tamil Nadu. We were joined on this trip by her daughter and my mother. Our plan was simple: three days of birding in Kotagiri, with a detour to Sims Park in Coonoor and then onwards to Ooty, which was less for us birders and more for our non-birding companions.



Indian Blackbird (*Turdus simillimus*)

So, on 5th March, the four of us gathered at Chandigarh Airport at around 0530 for our 0700 flight to Chennai and then onwards to Coimbatore. We arrived at around 1300 and drove to Kotagiri in the taxi that was booked for us for the entire time we would be in the Nilgiris. Our driver, Sarvanan, did not speak Hindi, and we did not speak Tamil, so



White-bellied Blue Flycatcher (*Cyornis pallidipes*)

English became our ‘la langue de préférence’, which tickled me much since it reminded me of an episode of ‘Yes Prime Minister’.



Nilgiri Sholakili (*Sholicola major*)

We arrived at our hotel on the outskirts of Kotagiri, Green Nest Resorts. It was right in the middle of a tea estate on one side and a wilderness of sorts on the other. Soon after our arrival, Sarbjeet ma'am and I picked up our binoculars and camera and went off. Our companions chose to take a walk in the tea estate, which was quite large and scenic. Immediately outside our rooms, there was one Indian Blackbird, a lifer for me.



Nilgiri Flycatcher (*Eumyias albicaudatus*)

Other than that, we saw the Malabar Whistlingthrush, Large-billed Crows, Red-whiskered Bulbuls, Long-tailed Shrikes, Jungle Babblers, Jungle Myna, House

Sparrows, and a Spotted Dove. This was still decent, seeing as we were birding just after sunset, in that low light that often remains for some minutes after the sun vanishes over the horizon.



Indian Blue Robin (*Larvivora brunnea*)

The next day, on 6th March, we had booked Mr Aggal Sivalingam (+91 9486530021), a bird guide from Kotagiri, to take us birding. This time, our companions joined us as well. We met him near his residence at around 0700 and he joined us in the car and took us towards Coonoor. We were a little late in meeting him, so we missed the Painted Bush-Quail, but he was able to show us Legge's Hawk Eagle, Hill Swallows, White-bellied Blue Flycatcher, the Nilgiri Flycatcher and the elusive and sought-after bird, the Nilgiri Sholakili. It was amazing, the bird came and sat in front of us. Sarbjeet ma'am



Black-and-orange Flycatcher (*Ficedula nigrorufa*)

and I went wild with our cameras, its shutter sounding like a machine gun. Once we were filled to our hearts' content, we drove into Coonoor and visited Sims Park.



Brown Fish-Owl (*Ketupa zeylonensis*)

Sims Park is a government biodiversity park, one of more than five such parks in the town. However, it is more famous amongst birders for its rich avian diversity. Mr



Velvet-fronted Nuthatch (*Sitta frontalis*)

Sivalingam was well versed in the area and, without wasting any time, he showed us the

Black-and-Orange Flycatcher and the Grey-hooded Canary Flycatcher, on a clump of dried hay by the side of a stream flowing through the park. He took us around the park



Nilgiri Wood-Pigeon (*Columba elphinstonii*)

and showed us the Nilgiri Wood-Pigeon, Bar-winged Flycatcher Shrike, Square-tailed Bulbul, Booted Warbler, Greenish Warbler, Brown-breasted Flycatcher, Nilgiri Flycatcher, and Tickle's Blue Flycatcher.



Loten's Sunbird (*Cinnyris lotenius*)

As we were clicking the flycatchers, Mr Sivalingam spotted a Brown Fish Owl perched in a huge tree across the stream. At first, we could not see it, then once we



Red-whiskered Bulbul (*Pycnonotus jocosus*)

spotted it, Sarbjeet Ma'am complained of a branch in front of it. Being a foot-and-a-half taller than her, I had no problem. We crossed the stream to get closer, and here we got a clear view of the owl. As we started walking back towards the exit, we saw a Vernal Hanging Parrot, Common Rosefinches, Indian Blue Robin, Indian Blackbirds, and heard in the distance, the calls of the White-cheeked Barbet, a bird that we were eager to see up close but so far it has been heard and not seen. After dropping Mr Sivalingam off at his residence, where we planned to meet him the next morning for Nilgiri Chilappan



Nilgiri Chilappan (*Montecincla cachinnans*)

(Laughingthrush), we returned to our hotel, took our baths, and went for sightseeing in Kotagiri. At night, we went outside the hotel and heard the Jungle Nightjar.



Nilgiri Chilappan (*Montecincla cachinnans*)

On 7th March, Sarbjeet Ma'am and I went birding outside the hotel gates in the morning, and we saw the usual birds and heard the Indian Scimitar Babbler. Later,



Nilgiri Chilappan (*Montecincla cachinnans*)

we joined Mr Sivalingam at Kotagiri and went with him to Longwood Shola. There, he had also brought two birders from Bangalore. As promised, he took us into the fields. On our walk, to our left were the steps of a field which had a boundary wall. Over the top of this wall, I could peek into the field. As I did so, I saw movement on the ground. Lo and behold, there was the Painted Bush-Quail, walking merrily downhill. Since the wall was too high for me to click a picture, I only looked at it with some satisfaction. Sarbjeet Ma'am was able to glimpse it in between the gap of the boundary wall and the gate.

Mr Sivalingam took us to a clearing where the long stalks of Indian Tobacco were waving in the wind. He asked us to stand quietly in one corner and wait. And soon enough, a pair of Nilgiri Chilappan made one stalk their perch. The four birders went at them with our cameras. The area was also home to many Bison, which we saw up close, and there were other birds, like the Black-and-Orange Flycatcher, Nilgiri Flycatcher, etc. We thanked Mr Sivalingam for his time and returned to our hotel. After breakfast, we



White-cheeked Barbet (*Psilopogon viridis*)

decided to take the day off birding, i.e., serious birding, for a birder is never not birding, and went sightseeing to Coonoor and Wellington, visiting the Madras Regimental Centre Museum, viewpoints around Coonoor, and finally the town itself.

8th March was our last day in Kotagiri. We packed our bags, loaded the taxi, and off we went towards Ooty. On the way, we visited Doddabetta Peak, the highest point in the Nilgiris. Immediately after reaching our hotel, Sterling Ooty-Fern Hill, we left for some sightseeing, visiting the Murugan Temple, where I saw the Nilgiri Flycatcher. Afterwards, we spent the afternoon at the Government Botanical Garden, which used to

be the gardens of the Governor of Madras Presidency's Summer Residence, later converted into the residence of the Governor of Madras post-independence, then the Governor of Tamil Nadu, and finally now open to the public. To our great pleasure, a pair of White-cheeked Barbets were nesting in a tree close to the ground. Finally, after so long, we were able to see the Barbet so close, and we took a million (maybe a little bit of



Indian Roller (*Coracias benghalensis*)

a hyperbole) photographs of the bird. Later, we also saw Blyth's Reed Warbler and Velvet-fronted Nuthatch. As the sun was about to lower in the sky, we drove to Ooty Lake and went boating.

On 9th March, we had planned to visit the Mudumalai Tiger Reserve, about two hours away from Ooty. But before that, we went for early morning birding around our hotel. Hoping to see something new, we were a bit disappointed when we didn't,



though it was nice nevertheless. We left for Mudumalai after breakfast. The route is scenic. Our visit to the tiger reserve was not entirely a loss. We didn't see the tiger, but we saw the elephants. The reserve is quite dry, infested with lantana bushes all over. Our chances of seeing a tiger were reduced further due to the presence of workers in the forest as well. We managed to see a pair of Indian Rollers, Pale-billed Flowerpecker, and Golden-fronted Leafbird. Anyhow, the journey back to Ooty was rewarding, since we saw over 40 Woolly-necked Storks in a pond next to the road.

Tired as we were after our journey, and our bags unpacked looming over our heads, we forwent the usual early morning birding and packed our luggage. We had planned our return journey to be a little different. Instead of driving from Ooty to Coimbatore, we took the UNESCO World Heritage Nilgiri Mountain Railway from Ooty



to Coonoor. This is one of the three Mountain Railways of India recognised by UNESCO, and with this train ride, I completed all three of them; Kalka-Shimla, and Darjeeling Mountain Railways being the other two. So, on 10th March, at noon, we were 'all aboard' and took the one-hour journey, passing through the historic and important towns of Lovedale and Wellington, winding down the curves through the valleys and tunnels, crossing over roads, until we reached Coonoor, where Sarvanan was waiting with our luggage. We drove to Coimbatore and then took our flight back home via Ahmedabad, reaching Chandigarh at around 2300.

This trip to the Nilgiris wasn't a first for Sarbjeet Ma'am and me, as we had been to Munnar, but this was indeed rewarding in terms of endemics that we saw here, for they are not seen in Munnar, the same way the Palani Laughingthrush, which we saw in Munnar, is not seen anywhere else.

1. Ashy Drongo (*Dicrurus leucophaeus*)
2. Ashy Prinia (*Prinia socialis*)
3. Asian Woolly-necked Stork (*Ciconia episcopus*)
4. Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike (*Hemipus picatus*)
5. Black-and-orange Flycatcher (*Ficedula nigrorufa*)

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6. Black-headed Ibis (*Threskiornis melanocephalus*)
 7. Black-rumped Flameback (Lesser Goldenbacked Woodpecker) (*Dinopium benghalense*)
 8. Blyth's Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus dumetorum*)
 9. Booted Warbler (*Iduna caligata*)
 10. Brown Fish-Owl (*Ketupa zeylonensis*)
 11. Brown-breasted Flycatcher (*Muscicapa muttui*)
 12. Cinereous Tit (*Parus cinereus*)
 13. Common Hoopoe (*Upupa epops*)
 14. Common Myna (*Acridotheres tristis*)
 15. Common Rosefinch (*Carpodacus erythrinus*)
 16. Golden-fronted Leafbird (Golden-fronted Chloropsis) (*Chloropsis aurifrons*)
 17. Greater Coucal (Southern) (*Centropus sinensis parroti*)
 18. Green Sandpiper (*Tringa ochropus*)
 19. Greenish Warbler (*Phylloscopus trochiloides*)
 20. Grey Junglefowl (*Gallus sonneratii*)
 21. Grey Wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*)
 22. Grey-headed Canary-Flycatcher (*Culicicapa ceylonensis*)
 23. Hill Swallow (House Swallow) (*Hirundo domicola*)
 24. House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*)
 25. Indian Blackbird (*Turdus simillimus*)
 26. Indian Blue Robin (*Larvivora brunnea*)
 27. Indian Golden Oriole (*Oriolus kundoo*)
 28. Indian Peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*)
 29. Indian Pond-Heron (*Ardeola grayii*)
 30. Indian Roller (*Coracias benghalensis*)
 31. Indian Scimitar-Babbler (*Pomatorhinus horsfieldii*)
 32. Indian White-eye (Oriental White-eye) (*Zosterops palpebrosus*)
 33. Jungle Babbler (*Argya striata*)
 34. Jungle Myna (*Acridotheres fuscus*)
 35. Jungle Nightjar (Indian Jungle Nightjar) (*Caprimulgus indicus*)
 36. Large-billed Crow (*Corvus macrorhynchos*)
 37. Legge's Hawk-Eagle (*Nisaetus kelaarti*)
 38. Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*)
 39. Long-tailed Shrike (*Lanius schach*)
 40. Loten's Sunbird (Long-billed Sunbird) (*Cinnyris lotenius*)
 41. Malabar Whistling-Thrush (*Myophonus horsfieldii*)
 42. Nilgiri Flycatcher (*Eumyias albicaudatus*)
 43. Nilgiri Laughingthrush (Nilgiri Chilappan) (*Montecincla cachinnans*)
 44. Nilgiri Sholakili (*Sholicola major*)

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45. Nilgiri Wood-Pigeon (*Columba elphinstonii*)
 46. Oriental Magpie-Robin (*Copsychus saularis*)
 47. Paddyfield Pipit (*Anthus rufulus*)
 48. Painted Bush-Quail (*Perdica erythrorhynchos*)
 49. Pale-billed Flowerpecker (*Dicaeum erythrorhynchos*)
 50. Pied Bushchat (*Saxicola caprata*)
 51. Red-whiskered Bulbul (*Pycnonotus jocosus*)
 52. Rock Pigeon (Feral Pigeon) (*Columba livia*)
 53. Rose-ringed Parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*)
 54. Scaly-breasted Munia (Spotted Munia) (*Lonchura punctulata*)
 55. Spot-breasted Fantail (White-spotted Fantail) (*Rhipidura albogularis*)
 56. Spotted Dove (*Spilopelia chinensis*)
 57. Square-tailed Bulbul (Black Bulbul) (*Hypsipetes ganeesa*)
 58. Streak-throated Woodpecker (*Picus xanthopygaeus*)
 59. Thick-billed Warbler (*Arundinax aedon*)
 60. Tickell's Blue Flycatcher (*Cyornis tickelliae*)
 61. Velvet-fronted Nuthatch (*Sitta frontalis*)
 62. Vernal Hanging-Parrot (Indian Lorikeet) (*Loriculus vernalis*)
 63. White-bellied Blue Flycatcher (*Cyornis pallidipes*)
 64. White-browed Wagtail (Large Pied Wagtail) (*Motacilla maderaspatensis*)
 65. White-cheeked Barbet (*Psilopogon viridis*)
 66. White-throated Kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*)

Munsyari

Rima Dhillon



Panchachuli Range

After seeing a beautiful photograph of a Satyr Tragopan— and on a whim and a prayer— a birding trip to Munsyari, Uttarakhand, was born. A quick Google search revealed that it is about twenty hours' drive from Chandigarh. Located at about 7,000 ft above MSL in the Pithoragarh district of the Kumaon region, it lies barely 100 km from the India-Nepal international border.

A quick call to Aseem, who had posted the photograph of the Satyr Tragopan on the Chandigarh Bird Club's WhatsApp group, had set it all in motion— and the plan was quickly chalked out. The long drive would require a night halt at Ranikhet, roughly



Helicopter

the halfway point. Our bird guide on site, Chandan Kumar of “Himalayan Shepherd,” was contacted, and the trip was on. Once the programme was presented to Capt. S.S. Cheema and to Alpana N. P. Singh, they needed no convincing.

Capt. Cheema, with his helicopter pilot buddies, managed to get us three seats on a helicopter service from Haldwani to Munsyari. It would give us an extra day for birding and save us 22 hours of driving.

Both the Tragopan and the “steel bird” were lifers for me, and my excitement doubled.

Departing Mohali at 5 a.m. on 15th March, we drove into Hotel Classio Inn, Haldwani, around 3 p.m., with stops for breakfast and lunch en route. The hotel was tucked away in a narrow alley off the main bazaar road. With some trepidation, we entered, expecting the worst. The rooms, however, were clean and perfectly adequate for a night’s stay.

The following morning, we boarded the helicopter at 8:30 a.m. Soaring over snow-clad peaks, we arrived in Munsyari barely forty minutes later.



Yellow-browed Tit (*Sylviparus modestus*), by Alpana

Day One Birding began as soon as we dropped our bags at Mansarovar Inn. A five-minute drive from our hotel, the road to Sarmoli village runs alongside a mountain stream. We were greeted by a mixed hunting party of warblers and tits feeding voraciously among thorny bushes at the water’s edge. Black-faced, Whistler’s, and Green Warblers, Black-throated Tit, and Yellow-bellied Fairy Fantail all posed beautifully. Small Niltava and Rufous-gorgeted Flycatcher obliged too, but a Hill Partridge, however, vanished in a flash into the undergrowth.

Sarmoli village, surrounded by forest and fields, offers a sweeping 180° view of the snow-covered Panchachuli Range. Large flocks of Plain Mountain Finches and Red-capped Serins covered the tall poplar trees. From time to time, they would rise into the air



Green-tailed Sunbird (*Aethopyga nipalensis*)

for no apparent reason, weaving in perfect unison through the crisp mountain air before settling down again on another tree.

The Long-billed Thrush, a shy skulker known to be in the area, eluded us despite repeated visits. Preet Cheema was left utterly disappointed at missing a Lifer.



Himalayan Monal (*Lophophorus impejanus*)

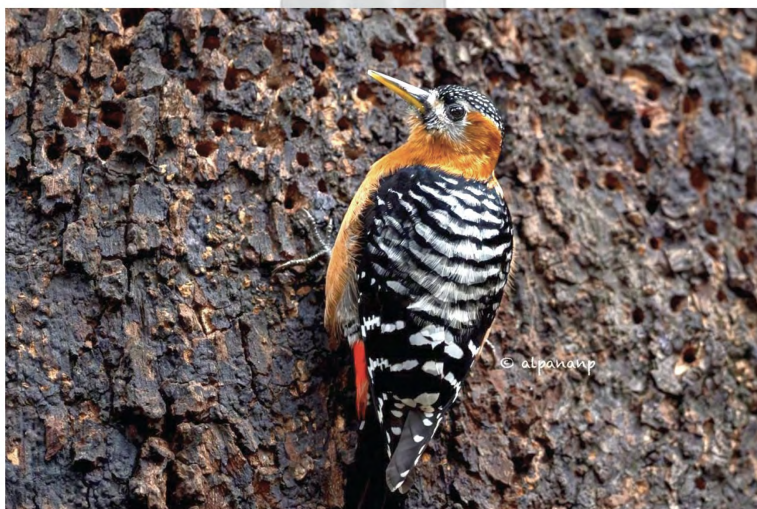
In the afternoon, we drove 10 km up to Khaliya Top. Rhododendrons in shades of red, pink, and white were in full bloom. The trilling songs of Rufous Sibias floated through the blossoms, while Variegated Laughingthrushes played tag among the pines. A Brown-fronted Woodpecker busily excavated its nest hole, oblivious to our presence, while the drumming of Scaly-bellied Woodpeckers echoed through the quiet afternoon.



Grey-winged Blackbird (*Turdus boulboul*), by Alpana

We were impatient to begin the search for our star bird, the Satyr Tragopan. Chandan explained that we would need to descend into the forest and try to track it. The entire patch held just one pair, and only the male made occasional, fleeting appearances. It was a daunting task, but in our excitement, we were more than ready.

Slithering and sliding over knee-deep fallen rhododendron leaves, we tried to move stealthily, dodging trees and rocky outcrops. Chandan would circle back with news of sightings— information that frustratingly, did little for us. After the first hour, frustration began to creep in. Preet, who had followed Chandan on yet another recce while I hung back, suddenly whispered the “T” word hoarsely. I could hear the furious clicking of his camera. Scrambling into position, I managed just a couple of shots before the bird— having casually strolled into view, its brilliant crimson plumage glowing— ambled off just as casually out of sight. We waited long for another appearance, but it was not to be.



Rufous-bellied Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos hyperythrus*), by Alpana

Rufous-breasted Woodpeckers, Alpine Thrush, Grey-crested Tit, and a covey of Kalij Pheasants were photographed, but everything paled in comparison. All evening, the

conversation revolved around the Tragopan. When reviewing photos, we realised that Preet had only captured its face, I had only its tail, and Alpana hadn't even seen it.



Alpine Thrush (*Zoothera mollissima*), by SS Cheema

We had two more days, and Chandan made every effort to give us a better view. The routine of the first day was repeated. Preet slipped once; I fell twice, injuring my hip while trying to save my camera. The Tragopan remained elusive, though we caught only fleeting glimpses, half-hidden in grass or behind bushes.



Spot-winged Grosbeak (*Mycerobas melanozanthos*)

Repeated visits over three days to both the Tragopan site and the location of the Long-billed Thrush yielded nothing.

The morning birding was targeted at sighting the tragopan at Khaliya Top. In the afternoon, we visited other locations for forest birds. The drive down to River Goriganga was very scenic, and we were able to see a flock of Spot-winged Grosbeaks, many warbler species, and flycatchers. Himalayan Rubythroat, Yellow-bellied Fairy Fantail, and Whistler's Warbler gave good pictures. Brown Dippers, White-capped Redstart, and Plumbeous Redstart were seen on the river.

The day of departure dawned overcast, with intermittent rain. Chandan decided on one final attempt before our afternoon departure by helicopter. This time, he positioned us on the road, certain the Tragopan would emerge onto the open grassy hillside below, as it had done before.



Satyr Tragopan (*Tragopan satyra*), by S.S Cheema

For the next two hours, we waited quietly. Subtly, activity began around us. Rufous Sibilas and Variegated Laughingthrushes arrived first, settling into the rhododendrons, followed by tits, warblers, and woodpeckers. But with our eyes fixed on the forest edge, we were oblivious to the surrounding chorus. As the light improved, pheasant activity began - a male Himalayan Monal with four females, soon joined by a pair of Koklass Pheasants. The Kalij covey returned too. It felt promising.

We waited patiently, then impatiently, as the minutes ticked by. And then, just as hope began to fade, the Primo Uomo appeared! Slowly, he stepped out of the forest, feeding on the low bamboo-like grass. Holding our breath, we focused entirely on

getting as many photographs as possible. Two minutes later, he was gone - utterly oblivious to the blood, sweat, and tears he had extracted from us for that one perfect sighting.



Chander, SS Cheema, Alpana, and Rima

Chandan, part of “Himalayan Shepherd”, a local organisation focused on biodiversity conservation and community work, is an excellent guide. He firmly adheres to his principles of not using playback to attract birds. In three and a half days, we recorded 83 species.

Munsyari:

Chandan: +91 87895 61035

Guiding fees: ₹3,000 per day

Local vehicle: ₹3,000 per day

Hotel Mansarovar Inn: ₹2,500 per room per day (meals extra; kitchen opens at 7:00 a.m.)

Chandigarh to Haldwani:

Vehicle (Innova Crysta): ₹6,000 per day

Hotel Classio Inn: ₹3,500 for two rooms (one night)

Helicopter: ₹10,000 per head (return)

Total cost of the expedition: ₹35,000 per person

Birding Locations:

1. Khaliya Top: Pheasants, Woodpeckers, Tits, Warblers, Minla, Siva, Laughingthrushes, Rufous Sibia
2. Sarmoli Village: Mountain Finches, Serins, Barbets, Warblers, Tits
3. Munsyari Helipad: Rosefinches, Bushchats, Stonechat, Raptors
4. Balati Bend (Potato Farm): Snow Pigeons, Himalayan Bluetail, Woodpeckers

5. Madkot-Munsiyari Road to Goriganga Bridge: Warblers, Kalij Pheasants, Warblers, Tits, Grosbeak, Flycatchers, Rubythroat

Checklist:

1. Satyr Tragopan (*Tragopan satyra*)
2. Koklass Pheasant (*Pucrasia macrolopha*)
3. Himalayan Monal (*Lophophorus impejanus*)
4. Kalij Pheasant (*Lophura leucomelanos*)
5. Brown-fronted Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos auriceps*)
6. Scaly-bellied Woodpecker (*Picus squamatus*)
7. Rufous-bellied Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos hyperythrus*)
8. Himalayan Griffon (*Gyps himalayensis*)
9. Ashy Drongo (*Dicrurus leucophaeus*)
10. Long-tailed Shrike (*Lanius schach*)
11. Black-headed Jay (*Garrulus lanceolatus*)
12. Yellow-billed Blue Magpie (*Urocissa flavirostris*)
13. Large-billed Crow (*Corvus macrorhynchos*)
14. Yellow-bellied Fairy Fantail (*Chelidorhynch hypoxanthus*)
15. Green-backed Tit (*Parus monticolus*)
16. Red-vented Bulbul (*Pycnonotus cafer*)
17. Himalayan Bulbul (*Pycnonotus leucogenys*)
18. Black Bulbul (*Hypsipetes leucocephalus*)
19. Lemon-rumped Warbler (*Phylloscopus chloronotus*)
20. Whistler's Warbler (*Seicercus whistleri*)
21. Grey-hooded Warbler (*Phylloscopus xanthoschistos*)
22. Black-faced Warbler (*Arbroscopus schisticeps*)
23. Black-chinned Babbler (*Stachyridopsis pyrrhops*)
24. Streaked Laughingthrush (*Garrulax lineatus*)
25. Variegated Laughingthrush (*Garrulax variegatus*)
26. Rufous Sibia (*Malacias capistratus*)
27. Chestnut-tailed Minla (*Minla ignotincta*)
28. Common Myna (*Acridotheres tristis*)
29. Small Niltava (*Niltava macgrigoriae*)
30. Rufous-bellied Niltava (*Niltava Sundara*)
31. Blue Whistling-Thrush (*Myophonus caeruleus*)
32. Rufous-gorgeted Flycatcher (*Ficedula strophilata*)
33. Blue-fronted Redstart (*Phoenicurus frontalis*)
34. Ultramarine Flycatcher (*Ficedula superciliaris*)
35. White-capped Redstart (*Phoenicurus leucocephalus*)
36. Grey Bushchat (*Saxicola ferreus*)

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37. Green-tailed Sunbird (*Aethopyga nipalensis*)
 38. House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*)
 39. Russet Sparrow (*Passer rutilans*)
 40. Plain Mountain Finch (*Leucosticte nemoricola*)
 41. Rock Bunting (*Emberiza cia*)
 42. Fire-fronted Serin (*Serinus pusillus*)
 43. Blue-winged Minla (*Actidunora cyanouroptera*)
 44. Asian barred Owlet (*Glaucidium cuculoides*)
 45. Long-tailed Minivet (*Pericrocotus ethologus*)
 46. Yellow-browed Tit (*Sylviparus modestus*)
 47. Black-throated Bushtit (*Aegithalos concinnus*)
 48. White-tailed Nuthatch (*Sitta himalayensis*)
 49. Little Forktail (*Enicurus scouleri*)
 50. Spotted Forktail (*Enicurus maculatus*)
 51. Alpine Accentor (*Prunella collaris*)
 52. Black-throated Accentor (*Prunella atrogularis*)
 53. Bearded Vulture/Lammergeier (*Gypaetus barbatus*)
 54. Hume's Leaf Warbler (*Phylloscopus humei*)
 55. Chestnut-crowned Laughingthrush (*Trochalopteron erythrocephalum*)
 56. Siberian Stonechat (*Saxicola maurus*)
 57. Eurasian Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*)
 58. Indian White-eye (*Zosterops palpalis*)
 59. Bar-tailed Treecreeper (*Certhia himalayana*)
 60. Hill Partridge (*Arborophila torqueola*)
 61. Great Barbet (*Psilopogon virens*)
 62. Grey-headed Woodpecker (*Picus canus*)
 63. Coal Tit (*Periparus ater*)
 64. Grey-crested Tit (*Lophophanes dichrous*)
 65. Chestnut-bellied Rock-Thrush (*Monticola rufiventris*)
 66. Snow Pigeon (*Columba leuconota*)
 67. Himalayan Bluetail (*Tarsiger rufilatus*)
 68. Grey-headed Canary-Flycatcher (*Culicicapa ceylonensis*)
 69. Brown Dipper (*Cinclus pallasii*)
 70. Grey Wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*)
 71. Brown-headed Barbet (*Psilopogon zeylanicus*)
 72. Eurasian Jay (*Garrulus glandarius*)
 73. Ashy-throated Warbler (*Phylloscopus macunipennis*)
 74. Buff-barred Warbler (*Phylloscopus pulcher*)
 75. Tickell's Leaf Warbler (*Phylloscopus affinis*)
 76. Grey-winged Blackbird (*Turdus bouboul*)

- 77. Hill Partridge (*Arborophila torqueola*)
- 78. Blue-throated Barbet (*Psilopogon asiaticus*)
- 79. Chestnut-headed Tesia (*Oligura castaneocoronata*)
- 80. Striated Laughingthrush (*Garrulus striatus*)
- 81. Verditer Flycatcher (*Eumyias thalassinus*)
- 82. Alpine Thrush (*Zoothera mollissima*)
- 83. Bar-throated Siva (*Actinodura strigula*)
- 84. Spot-winged Grosbeak (*Mycerobas melanozanthos*)



Bar-throated Siva (*Actinodura strigula*)

CBC Field Trip: Dagshai, Himachal Pradesh

January 2026: (18.01.2026)

Weather: Clear sky and sunny

Birders:

1. Rima Dhillon
2. Sarbjeet Kaur
3. Alpana NP Singh
4. Aprajita Lobana
5. Jasbir S. Randhawa
6. Subhash Sapru
7. Parvin Nain

At the start of the New Year, members of the Chandigarh Bird Club headed out to Dagshai in Himachal Pradesh, on their monthly field trip— an easy drive of under two hours from Chandigarh.

It was a bright, sunny day, though bird activity proved to be quieter than expected, and we managed to record a modest number of species.



Asian koel (*Eudynamys scolopaceus*)

We began by driving along the road leading to the cricket maidan, stopping wherever bird calls drew our attention. Being a Sunday, the area was lively with local cricket matches in progress, and the resultant noise and disturbance perhaps contributed to reduced sightings. The Military Farms Service of the Army was formally

disbanded in 2021. The MF location in Dagshai was a great birding patch, thanks to its cattle, fodder stacks, and dung heaps that attracted insect life. The now empty buildings and abandoned cattle sheds no longer support the same richness of birdlife.

The road eventually leads to a cemetery dating back to the British Raj. Here too, birding was underwhelming. Apart from a few Rock Buntings, Russet Sparrows, Large-billed Crows, and Grey Bushchats, little else was seen. Entry to the cemetery was not possible, as the gates have been locked following incidents of vandalism.

Charing Cross, the central hub of Dagshai, offered a change in atmosphere. With its Army canteen, small daily needs shop, and a stretch of tall oaks and pines leading to a walking track, it felt more promising. We were welcomed by a lively mixed hunting party of warblers and tits moving actively through the canopy. Among them were Chestnut-bellied Nuthatches, Bar-tailed Treecreepers, Black-throated Tits, and a Speckled Piculet, all busily foraging among the leaves.



Bar-tailed Treecreeper (*Certhia himalayana*)

Dagshai remains a quiet and largely undisturbed hill town, and on previous visits it has been a rewarding birding destination. The relatively low diversity observed at some of the key spots on this visit may simply have been one of those off days that birders know all too well.

Checklist:

1. Red Junglefowl (*Gallus gallus*)
2. Brown-fronted Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos auriceps*)
3. Greater Flameback (*Chrysocolaptes guttacristatus*)

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4. Black-headed Jay (*Garrulus lanceolatus*)
 5. Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher (*Culicicapa ceylonensis*)
 6. Large-billed Crow (*Corvus macrorhynchos*)
 7. Himalayan Black-lored Tit (*Machlolophus xanthogenys*)
 8. Himalayan Prinia (*Prinia crinigera*)
 9. Black-throated Tit (*Aegithalos concinnus*)
 10. Lesser Whitethroat (*Curruca curruca*)
 11. Whiskered Yuhina (*Yuhina flavicollis*)
 12. Indian White-eye (*Zosterops palpebrosus*)
 13. Black-chinned Babbler (*Cyanoderma pyrrhops*)
 14. Rufous Sibia (*Heterophasia capistrata*)
 15. Jungle Babbler (*Argya striata*)
 16. Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch (*Sitta cinnamoventris*)
 17. Bar-tailed Treecreeper (*Certhia himalayana*)
 18. Black-throated Thrush (*Turdus atrogularis*)
 19. Tickell's Blue Flycatcher (*Cyornis tickelliae*)
 20. Asian Koel (*Eudynamys scolopaceus*)
 21. Black Redstart (*Phoenicurus ochruros*)
 22. Chestnut-bellied Rock Thrush (*Monticola rufiventris*)
 23. Rufous-breasted Accentor (*Prunella strophiatea*)
 24. Red-breasted Flycatcher (*Ficedula parva*)
 25. Himalayan Griffon (*Gyps himalayensis*)
 26. Slaty-headed Parakeet (*Psittacula himalayana*)
 27. Grey-hooded Warbler (*Phylloscopus xanthoschistos*)
 28. Himalayan Bulbul (*Pycnonotus leucogenys*)
 29. Streaked Laughingthrush (*Trochalopteron lineatum*)
 30. Pied Bushchat (*Saxicola caprata*)
 31. Russet Sparrow (*Passer cinnamomeus*)
 32. Rock Bunting (*Emberiza cia*)
 33. Egyptian Vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*)
 34. Red-billed Blue Magpie (*Urocissa erythrorhyncha*)
 35. Blue Whistling-Thrush (*Myophonus caeruleus*)

CBC Field Trip: Chakki Morh, Himachal Pradesh

March 2026: (10.03.2026)

Weather: Sunny and warm

Birders:

1. Rima Dhillon
2. Saroj Gulati
3. Bindoo Nangia
4. Jaswinder

Chakki Morh, a well-known birding hotspot for Chandigarh birders, was recently visited to assess ongoing nesting activity. Over the course of the morning, approximately 11 km of the track was covered.

Birding began as soon as we turned off the highway onto the Chakki Morh - Bhojnagar Road. The garbage dump at the top of the road is always teeming with birdlife early in the day. As expected, Laughingthrushes, Warblers, Leiothrix, Babblers, Red Junglefowl, and Kalij Pheasants did not disappoint.

Driving further down, the next halt was the familiar “first bridge.” In the past, a pair of Crested Kingfishers could reliably be seen perched on the rocky outcrop overlooking the mountain stream. Unfortunately, this site has been heavily disturbed by a homestay constructed almost at the edge of the stream. The surrounding undergrowth has been ruthlessly cleared. As a result, only a few resilient White-capped Redstarts, Plumbeous Redstarts, and Blue Whistling-Thrushes were recorded here.

The next stop was a plateau formed by debris dumped during highway widening operations. Over time, this area has regenerated with vegetation, creating a suitable habitat for small seed-eating and insectivorous birds. The beautiful Himalayan Rubythroat and Rusty-cheeked Scimitar-Babbler provided excellent photo opportunities. This spot remains a popular halt, flanked as it is by terraced fields on both sides of the road.

Further along, at the second bridge, the cremation ground, and the temple, similar species were observed, with no significant additions to the list.

Our sixth stop was Tanwer Guesthouse, where we paused for breakfast. Although we had carried our own food, we requested Tanwarji to make us some tea. Normally, the teashop caters to visiting birders, but with construction work underway, his wife was kind enough to prepare tea in their private kitchen.

This location offers a true ‘bird’s-eye view’ of the gully below. A trickling stream winds through dense undergrowth, often rewarding birders with surprise sightings alongside regular species. It is also one of the best spots for woodpeckers, thanks to the mix of mature trees and adjoining agricultural fields. And, of course, birding here comes with the added pleasure of birding from a chair while sipping tea.

We drove up to Sharma tea stall, which is a sort of bird hide created by birders. Sharma ji has a shanty tea stall. He makes great parathas and omelettes. He was encouraged to scatter rice and other grains outside his tea stall, and to keep a few water bowls to attract birds. Within a few months, birds started appearing regularly, and Sharmaji set up chairs across the road to provide seating for birders as they photographed the birds appearing on the water bowls. It was a win-win situation for both birders and for Sharmaji.

It was already late in the morning, and the road ahead was closed due to a landslide, so we decided to turn back.

Checklist:

Stop 1:

1. Red Junglefowl (*Gallus gallus*)
2. Feral Pigeon (*Columba livia*)
3. Shikra (*Tachyspiza badia*)
4. Great Barbet (*Psilopogon virens*)
5. Speckled Piculet (*Picumnus innominatus*)
6. Rose-ringed Parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*)
7. Plum-headed Parakeet (*Psittacula cyanocephala*)
8. Black Drongo (*Dicrurus macrocercus*)
9. Ashy Drongo (*Dicrurus leucophaeus*)
10. Red-billed Blue Magpie (*Urocissa erythroryncha*)
11. Rufous Treepie (*Dendrocitta vagabunda*)
12. Grey Treepie (*Dendrocitta formosae*)
13. Large-billed Crow (*Corvus macrorhynchos*)
14. Asian Tit (*Parus cinereus*)
15. Common Tailorbird (*Orthotomus sutorius*)
16. Grey-breasted Prinia (*Prinia hodgsonii*)
17. Red-vented Bulbul (*Pycnonotus cafer*)
18. Himalayan Bulbul (*Pycnonotus leucogenys*)
19. Hume’s Warbler (*Phylloscopus humei*)
20. Common Chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus collybita*)
21. Grey-hooded Warbler (*Phylloscopus xanthoschistos*)
22. Indian White-eye (*Zosterops palpebrosus*)

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23. Black-chinned Babbler (*Cyanoderma pyrrhops*)
 24. Rusty-cheeked Scimitar-Babbler (*Erythrogonys erythrogenys*)
 25. Streaked Laughingthrush (*Trochalopteron lineatum*)
 26. Red-billed Leiothrix (*Leiothrix lutea*)
 27. Jungle Babbler (*Argya striata*)
 28. White-crested Laughingthrush (*Garrulax leucolophus*)
 29. Common Myna (*Acridotheres tristis*)
 30. Oriental Magpie-Robin (*Copsychus saularis*)
 31. Blue Whistling-Thrush (*Myophonus caeruleus*)
 32. Kalij Pheasant (*Lophura leucomelanos*)

Stop 2:

33. Himalayan Rubythroat (*Calliope pectoralis*)
34. Plumbeous Redstart (*Phoenicurus fuliginosus*)
35. White-capped Redstart (*Phoenicurus leucocephalus*)
36. Pied Bushchat (*Saxicola caprata*)
37. Purple Sunbird (*Cinnyris asiaticus*)
38. House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*)
39. Russet Sparrow (*Passer cinnamomeus*)

Stop 3:

40. Common Hawk-Cuckoo (*Hierococcyx varius*)
41. Blue-throated Barbet (*Psilopogon asiaticus*)
42. Eurasian Kestrel/Common Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*)
43. Alexandrine Parakeet (*Psittacula eupatria*)
44. Slaty-headed Parakeet (*Psittacula himalayana*)
45. White-throated Fantail (*Rhipidura albicollis*)
46. Eastern Red-rumped Swallow (*Cecropis daurica*)
47. Black Bulbul (*Hypsipetes leucocephalus*)
48. Hume's Warbler (*Phylloscopus humei*)
49. Bar-tailed Treecreeper (*Certhia himalayana*)
50. Common Rosefinch (*Carpodacus erythrinus*)
51. Chestnut-eared Bunting (*Emberiza fucata*)

For a detailed, area-wise checklist, please refer to the Chandigarh Bird Club listings on eBird.

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.*



President - Rima Dhillon

Vice President - Narbir Kahlon

Secretary - Amandeep Singh Channa

Joint Secretary - Navjit Singh

Treasurer - Mahesh Garg

Editors:

Rima Dhillon

Amandeep Singh Channa

Jasbir Singh Randhawa

Back Cover - Indian Grey Hornbill (*Ocyrceros birostris*) by Rima Dhillon

