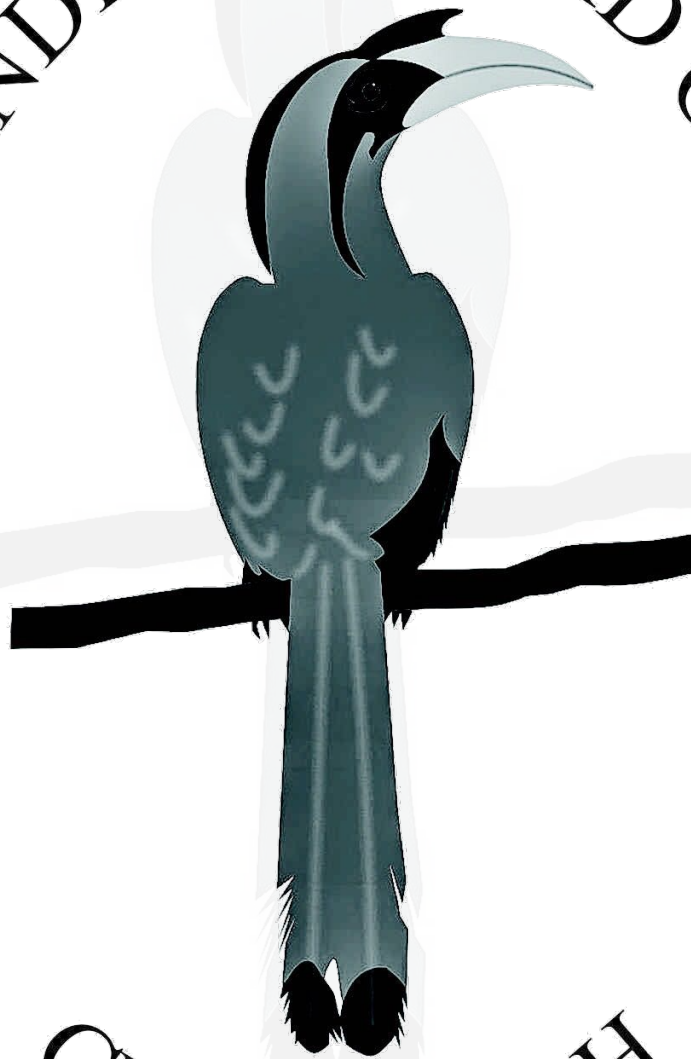

Whispering Wings®

Newsletter of the Chandigarh Bird Club®

CHANDIGARH BIRD CLUB



CHANDIGARH

Volume 7 - 3rd Edition
January - March 2022

From the Editor's Desk

March is gone and spring is here. Birds are busy nesting and it is the time when Coral and Silk cotton bloom...birds flock to the flower laden trees and birdwatchers gloat over them.

As the nesting season begins, we see the birds in their breeding plumage, draped in their natty robes. Soon they will be busy carrying food to the nests for the chicks. Sooner than later, the fledglings would be following the parents, begging for food. But breeding season shall go on. Pittas and Bee-eaters (Green, Blue bearded and Blue tailed) shall start nesting towards the end of June, when first rains break the heat spell. The birding community shall be kept on their toes as all of us want “that” picture.

But should we be waiting near the nest to take that picture; that is the question! No matter how well we may justify it, in my opinion, we should not trespass the sacred space of a birds nest. Just before we get into a for or against discussion, please observe a bird when it approaches its nest. It never flies straight to its nest. It always tries subterfuge so as to confuse the observer and not reveal the location. It is perhaps to save its eggs and subsequently the hatchlings from predators. If the bird is so careful to not divulge the exact location of its nest, what divine right do we have to locate it and photograph the nest, eggs and chicks? As birders, we should work towards the protection and conservation of birds...

May you always hear the bird song!

Mitinderpal Singh Sekhon



**GREY TREEPIE, AT CHAKKI MOR
BY MITINDERPAL SINGH SEKHON**

Secretary's Report

The new year dawned with cold foggy days. A new wave of COVID-19 was predicted and restrictions were still in place in some areas around Chandigarh.

The Asian Waterfowl Census was scheduled during January. Members of CBC volunteer for the census with the Punjab Wildlife Department, at Harike Wetland, Keshopur Chhambh, Shallapatan, Nangal and Ropar. The first three were indefinitely postponed and finally cancelled due to a lot of the department staff being down with covid. Members participated at Ropar and Nangal which was held in February.

The annual HSBC birdrace event was held on the 27th, the last Sunday of February. There were over 50 participants in 11 teams. Many years have seen at least one new species emerge out of the huge effort made over 12 hours in a single day. In the past, Golden Bush Robin, and Brown Bullfinch were discovered at Chakki Mor. This year it was the Eastern Imperial Eagle at Chhappar Chhirri.

A flock of 5 to 8 Short-eared Owls were seen at Chhappar Chhirri for the first time this winter. It is along the winter migratory route of these owls but they have usually been seen at other locations. A single Persian Wheatear has also been spotted at this location.

A monthly photography competition was introduced for the members wherein a bird of the month is announced and birders send in photos of that particular bird. The monthly activities of the club were organised on schedule. Club meetings and field trips were well attended.

In the coming summer months there will be a lot of nesting activity with altitudinal migrants returning for the breeding season. Birds and birders will once again look forward to welcoming a new generation.

Happy Birding!

Rima Dhillon



Chandigarh Bird Race

CB's most awaited event of the year is the HSBC Chandigarh Bird Race. Last year, in the middle of the pandemic, we held a slimmed down version. But this year, we were past the worst of it, and it was an opportunity for the members to get together. So, it was with great jubilation that we announced the full-scale HSBC Chandigarh Bird Race.

HSBC Chandigarh BirdRace is a dawn to dusk event where participants are to form groups of two to four members and cover as much area as they can from 5 in the morning to 5 in the evening of that very day. Teams venture as far as the ISCR allows them, some starting at 0300 hrs to get to their starting point by the appointed time. This year more than 50 participants covered a distance of over 150 kilometre to see 257 species.

As with every year, there was a new addition to the list of birds of the ISCR. Team Kestrel spotted an Eastern Imperial Eagle in Chhappar Chhirri, a first for the region. Among the other great sightings were Desert Wheatear, Isabelline Wheatear, Short-eared Owl, Indian Scops Owl, Blue-fronted Redstart, Indian Thick-knee, a large flock of Great Crested Grebes at Kaushalya Dam, and a large flock of White-tailed Lapwings at Chhappar Chhirri. But the absence of Painted Storks and Pied Kingfishers has been worrisome.

Team Kestrel, with Rajive Das, Mohit Kohli, Saiyam Nagar, and Siddharth Nagar, recorded 154 species. They bagged the third place. With 181 species, Team Falcon, comprising of Vikas Sharma, Nitin Singh, Karmanye Chaudhary, and Gajinder Bains, were placed second. The first position went to Team Black Baza, with Shruti, Sunny, Gurjeet Virk and Rajesh Khokar.

The daylong flurry of activity was topped by a scrumptious dinner at Hotel Ikon, courtesy our sponsor, HSBC.



Winter is not a season, it's a celebration



SUKHNA LAKE, NOVEMBER 2021

The best time to visit Chandigarh is during winters, which begins in the middle of November and extends till middle of March. The weather is pleasant here during this season and the city receives the maximum tourist footfall. January is the coldest month with chilly nights and foggy days. Apart from this, there is one more thing which generally remains unnoticed by most of the residents as well as tourists.

I joined Chandigarh Bird Club in the year 2019. Since my joining CBC, it was my third winter season. Now, I feel that in the City Beautiful, Chandigarh, winter is not just a season, but much more. It's a golden opportunity when you can see nature more closely while you're in the city. A large number of migratory birds start arriving here by the middle of October after covering long distances from regions like Siberia, Central Asia, China, Afghanistan, and the upper Himalayas and stay here till March. Even some of the resident birds including Cormorants, Grey Heron, Purple Heron and some other species, which are difficult to spot in the rest of the months, can be easily seen in these months.

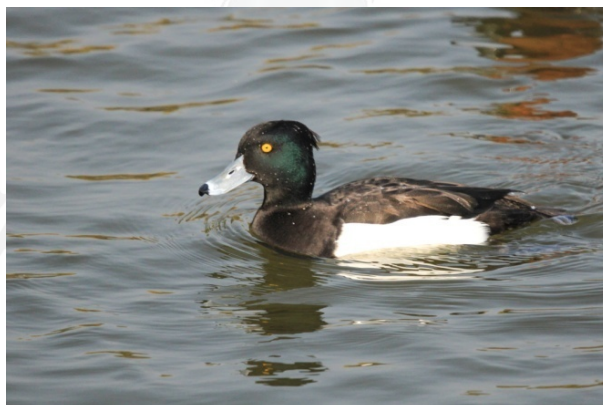
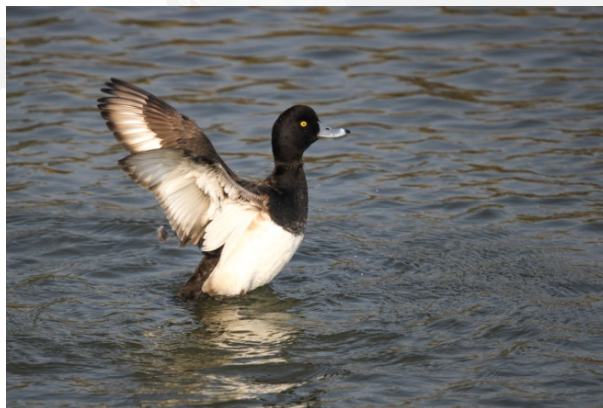
These birds are not only beautiful and colourful but also have some extraordinary qualities. There are two water bodies in Chandigarh that serve as wetlands for these birds. The main of these is the Sukhna Lake and the other which is relatively smaller in size, but with equally rich diversity is Dhanas Lake. At both these water bodies you can see and enjoy these species of birds from October to March. In this winter season starting from October 2021, I have spotted and clicked, a large number of species of waterfowl, migratory as well as residents, including Great



SUKHNA LAKE, OCTOBER 2021

Crested Grebe, Ruddy Shelduck, Common Pochard, Tufted Duck, Little Grebe, Bar-headed Goose, Northern Shoveler, Mallard, Northern Pintail, Eurasian Coot, Eurasian Wigeon, Green-winged Teal, Grey Heron, Purple Heron at one or both of these water bodies.

Through this article, I am sharing my experience including the pictures I have clicked this winter, so that the next time you see any of these birds, you will know about them. Though, most of our club members are aware of this, I think those who do not know about this Winter Carnival of Chandigarh should also be made aware of this feature of our City Beautiful.



TUFTED DUCK — DUCK WITH A TUFT



RUDDY SHELDUCK — THEY SCALE THE MIGHTY HIMALAYAS WHEN THEY MIGRATE TO INDIA FROM THE NORTH ATTAINING HEIGHTS OF 6800 METRE.



NORTHERN PINTAIL — AN ELEGANT MEDIUM-SIZED DUCK WITH A SLIM PROFILE, LONG NARROW NECK AND POINTED TAIL. THE MALE'S LONG CENTRAL TAIL FEATHERS GIVE RISE TO THE SPECIES' ENGLISH AND SCIENTIFIC NAMES.



MALLARD — MALE MALLARDS HAVE A DARK, IRIDESCENT-GREEN HEAD AND BRIGHT YELLOW BILL. THE GREY BODY IS SANDWICHED BETWEEN A BROWN BREAST AND BLACK REAR. FEMALES AND JUVENILES ARE MOTTLED BROWN WITH ORANGE-AND-BROWN BILLS. BOTH SEXES HAVE A WHITE-BORDERED, BLUE 'SPECTRUM' PATCH IN THE WING.



GREEN-WINGED TEAL — ITS NAME IS DERIVED FROM THE GREEN CRESCENT PRESENT ON ITS WINGS THAT ARE MAINLY VISIBLE WHILE IT FLIES. THIS GREEN MARK OR SPECULUM IS PRESENT IN BOTH MALE AND FEMALE BIRDS. THE MOST STRIKING THING ABOUT THE GREEN-WINGED TEAL IS, OF COURSE, THE GREEN EYE PATCH THAT IS SEEN IN MALES.



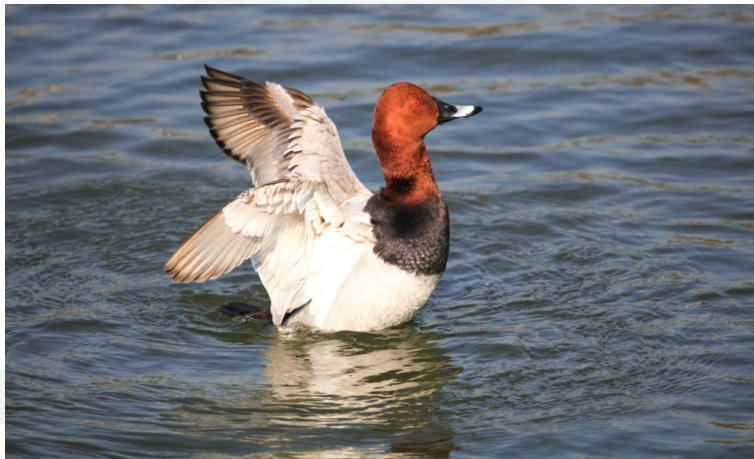
GADWALL — MALES ARE INTRICATELY PATTERNED WITH GREY-BROWN, AND WITH A BLACK PATCH AT THE TAIL; FEMALES RESEMBLE MALE MALLARDS, ALTHOUGH WITH A THINNER, DARKER BILL. FEMALES ARE PATTERNED WITH BROWN AND BUFF AND HAVING A THIN ORANGE EDGE TO THEIR DARK BILLS.



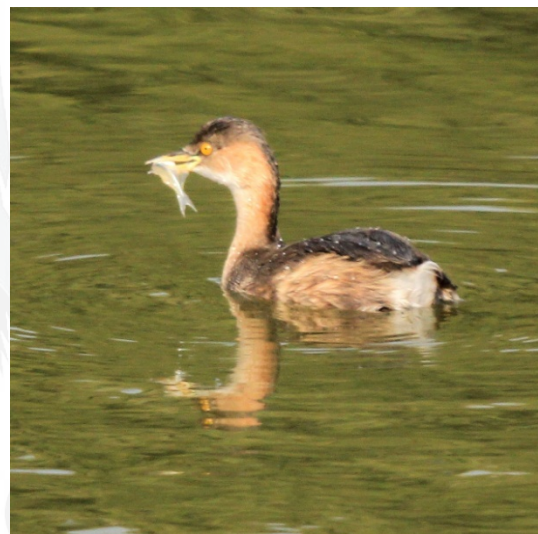
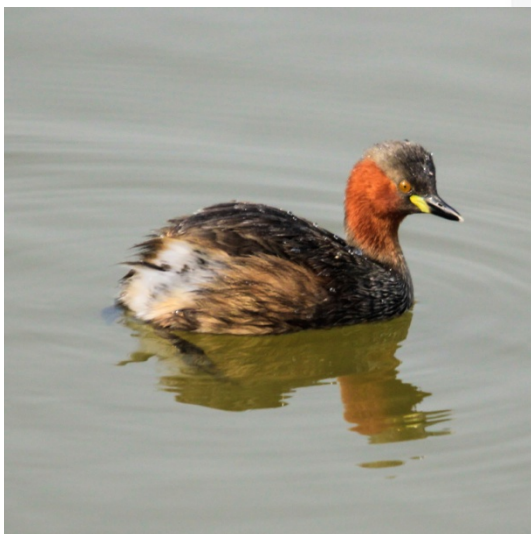
BAR-HEADED GEESE — ONE OF THE HIGHEST FLYING BIRDS IN THE WORLD, THE BAR-HEADED GOOSE FLIES ABOVE THE HIMALAYAN MOUNTAINS WHEN IT MIGRATES, AT HEIGHTS THAT MAY REACH 30,000 FEET. THIS HANDSOME STOUT-BODIED GOOSE GETS ITS NAME FROM THE DOUBLE BARS OF DARK FEATHERS THAT WRAP AROUND THE BACK OF ITS WHITE HEAD.



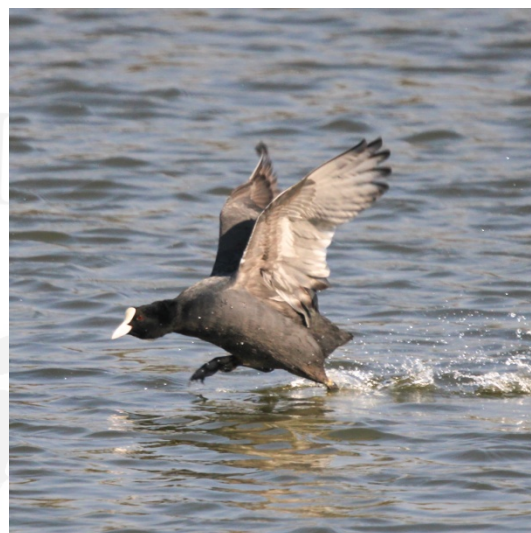
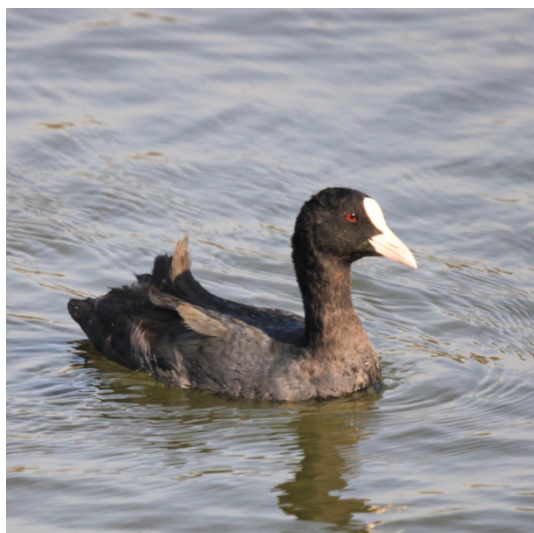
NORTHERN SHOVELERS — WITH THE NAME DERIVED FROM ITS HIGHLY SPECIALISED SPOON SHAPED BILL THAT IS USED TO FORAGE FOR AQUATIC INVERTEBRATES. BOTH MALES AND FEMALES HAVE DIFFERENT PATTERS AND COLOURINGS. BREEDING MALE SHOVELERS ARE BOLD WHITE, BLUE, GREEN, AND RUST, BUT THEIR MOST NOTABLE FEATURE IS THEIR WHITE CHEST AND WHITE LOWER SIDES.



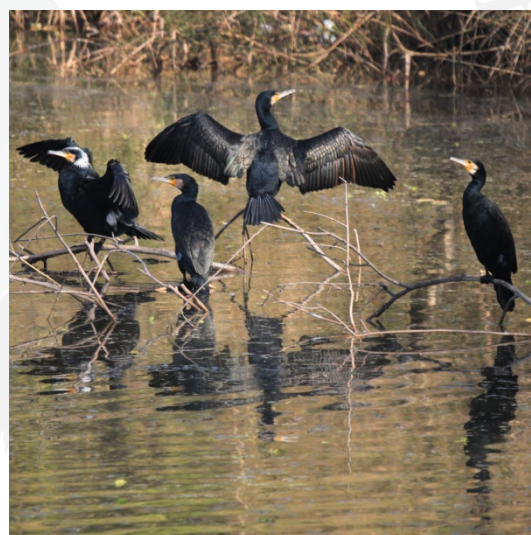
COMMON POCHARD



LITTLE GREBE



EURASIAN COOT



GREAT CORMORANT



BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT HERON

**GREY HERON****PURPLE HERON****SUKHNA LAKE, MARCH 2022**

Every winter season, these birds come here, all what is needed is that we should cherish the environment suitable for these guests so that in the coming winters also, they come to our city and we get a chance to host them. If you have an interest in nature, then whenever you get a chance, go to these water bodies and enjoy the beauty of nature. Lastly, while the city of Chandigarh is known for its planning and modernity, the arrival of migratory birds every year is proof that despite the development, our city is well connected to nature.

Lalit Mohan Bansal

Chandigarh Waterfowl Census

On Thursday, 10th February 2022, Chandigarh Bird Club conducted its 5th Annual Waterfowl Census. Four teams went to four waterfowl hotspots in and around Chandigarh.

Rima Dhillon, Subhash Sapru, and Lalit Mohan Bansal covered Sukhna Reserve Forest.



Karmannye Chaudhary, Simmi Waraich, and Saroj Gulati covered Sukhna Jogging Track.



Mitinderpal Singh Sekhon, Gajinder Bains, Alpana, and Charanjit Singh Grewal covered Motemajra.



Sarbjeet Kaur, Minni Sarkaria, Aprajita Lobana, Gurbaksh Sandhu, and Amandeep Singh Channa covered Ghaggar River.



The results can be found in the table below:

Sr No	Species	Sukhna Back	Sukhna Front	Matemajra	Ghaggar	Total
1	Coot, Common		8	27	3	38
2	Cormorant, Great		46	1		47
3	Cormorant, Little		16	2		18
5	Darter	3				3
6	Duck, Indian Spot-billed	6	21		19	46
7	Duck, Knob-billed/Comb			5		5
8	Duck, Tufted		2			2
9	Egret, Cattle			113	29	142
10	Egret, Intermediate			2		2
11	Gadwall			90	1	91
12	Goose, Bar headed		2	18		20
13	Grebe, Little				2	2
14	Heron, Black-crowned Night		14			14
15	Heron, Grey		3		7	10
16	Heron, Indian Pond			2		2
17	Heron, Purple		1			1
18	Ibis, Black-headed			1		1
19	Ibis, Red-naped	7			2	9
20	Jacana, Pheasant-tailed			2		2
21	Kingfisher, White-throated		3		2	5
22	Lapwing, Red-wattled		1		7	8
23	Lapwing, White-tailed			2	4	6
24	Mallard	2				2
25	Moorhen, Common		16	84	35	135
26	Pintail, Northern		38			38
27	Pochard, Common			12		12
28	Ruff				1	1
29	Sandpiper, Common				2	2
30	Sandpiper, Green				3	3
31	Shelduck, Ruddy		76		16	92
32	Shoveler, Northern		32	294		326
33	Stilt, Black-winged			20	37	57
34	Stork, Woolly-necked				2	2
35	Swamphen, Grey-headed			28	2	30
36	Teal, Common		12	158	90	260
37	Wagtail, Grey				1	1
38	Wagtail, Western Yellow			2	25	27
39	Wagtail, White		1		6	7
40	Waterhen, White-breasted		4	2	3	9
41	Wigeon			24		24
	Total	18	296	889	299	1502
	Total Species	4	18	21	23	41

Short-eared Owl

Short-eared owls are passage migrants in and around Chandigarh. They were once spotted in Jawaharpur village past Dera Bassi, in 2017. A parliament of about 17 owls had made the sandy area there, their resting spot. A long-eared owl was also part of this group.



SHORT-EARED OWL, NOVEMBER 2017, AT JAWAHARPUR

At that time, we at CBC are very excited about this discovery and in our excitement, we made public the location of these owls. Over the course of the following week, photographers from as far as New Delhi came in their 4x4s and SUVs and drove the owls away.



However, there has been a recent discovery of another parliament of owls in Mohali. And I'm not endangering these owls when I reveal their location. Banda Singh



Bahadur Memorial in Chhappar Chhirri had been harbouring about 12 Short-eared Owls until the first week of April.

The owls were first seen by CBC members Preet Cheema, Janinder Rana and Munish Jauhar in the surrounding areas on 27th February 2022. Over a week later, on 9th March 2022, looking for an entirely different bird in Chhappar Chhirri, I ran into Preet Cheema and we saw about 8 Short-eared Owls both outside the walls in the fields and inside the compound of the memorial. Before and after my first visit, many photographers have been to the spot. On the very next day, I took Rima Dhillon to the spot to investigate further the number of owls present there and to get a better look at the Persian Wheatear, the other rare bird there. We weren't disappointed. We located 12 Short-eared Owls that day and some more photographers.

Early in April, I was informed by another conservationist that some of the owls have been found dead, hunted by kites. He said that due to the photographers' wish for a flying shot, they disturb the owls; one in particular asked local boys to run into the fields to get the owls to fly. I contacted some senior members like Club President Professor Mitinderpal Singh Sekhon and Rima Dhillon, informing them of the situation. Gitanjali Kanwar from World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF-India) and Rima Dhillon went to the memorial to discuss the issue with the authorities there, after it was found the local government had limited jurisdiction regarding limiting the number of people who visit the memorial. The memorial has been leased out to private company for tourism. Also, the lack of any evidence about dead owls is also a reason for the forest department's reluctance to act.

Whether the owls died, or just flew away due to disturbances caused by repeated visits by photographers, it is worth remembering that the safety of the owls in Chhappar Chhirri was compromised. Chandigarh Bird Club does not have any enforcement authority over its members, especially over the non-member photographers. Morally, everybody must confront such encroachment of habitat by invasive photographers who disturb the birds for that perfect shot to post on social media for likes.



Amandeep Singh Channa

Persian Wheatear

It would seem the Chhappar Chhirri has once again become a birding hotspot. Only on the day of the BirdRace, two teams saw three exciting species in the area; Eastern Imperial Eagle, Desert Wheatear and a flock of about 50 White-tailed Lapwings, a rare sight indeed. On other days, birders have seen Short-eared Owls. But the rarest and the most sought after specie was the Red-tailed or Persian Wheatear (*Oenanthe chrysopygia*).

Those familiar with Chhappar Chhirri are aware of the area surrounding the walls of the memorial. To the north of the complex is a dry wasteland, bounded by fields along the wall, a dirt road to the west, and metalled roads to the north and east. This sandy land is home to many scrub birds, namely the Variable Wheatear, Desert Wheatear, Crested Lark, Ashy-crowned Sparrowlark, etc. A new addition to this list is a solitary Red-tailed Wheatear. It was a new record for CBC, spotted and photographed by Rajive Das.



Known by other named like the Afghan Wheatear, Persian Wheatear and earlier was also known as Kurdish Wheatear (the holy trinity for any American defence expert), it is found in habitats typical of the regions after which it is named; dry, arid scrub lands. Red-tailed Wheatear is a small bird, though larger than a sparrow at 15 centimetre long. Its a drab bird, with grey-brown plumage above and grey-white below. Its distinctive features are its rufous ear-coverts, and reddish rump and lower outer-tail feathers. There is no dimorphism, however males have black between the eye and bill.

As I wrote earlier, it was a solitary bird out there in that area. But it could be seen quite frequently as it inhabited only that small space, fluttering from one side of the road to the other.

Amandeep Singh Channa



**WHITE-CAPPED BUNTING, AT CHAKKI MOR
BY MITINDERPAL SINGH SEKHON**



**INDIAN WHITE-EYE, AT CHAKKI MOR
BY MITINDERPAL SINGH SEKHON**

Whispering Wings®

NEWSLETTER OF THE CHANDIGARH
BIRD CLUB



Accepted 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 the 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:

- 1. Bring people, especially the younger generation closer to nature, through birding and help them to enjoy the outdoors while making out a fun activity.*
- 2. To make individuals and government more sensitive towards the environment to create a dynamic database for analysis to focus on conservation efforts.*
- 3. To create a forum for birders to share information and discuss issues related to this activity.*

Editors:-

Mitinderpal Singh Sekhon

Amandeep Singh Channa

President - Mitinderpal Singh Sekhon

Vice President - Narbir Singh Kahlon

Secretary - Rima Dhillon

Joint Secretary - Sarbjeet Kaur

Treasurer - Mahesh Garg