

WHISPERING WINGS[®]



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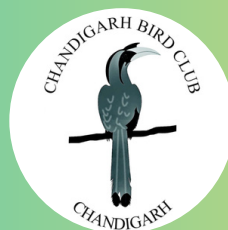
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Cover Photo

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**CHANDIGARH
BIRD CLUB[®]**



NEWSLETTER

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EDITORS DESK



RIMA DHILLON

PRESIDENT, CHANDIGARH BIRD CLUB

A Very Happy New Year 2024!

In the closing months of the year there is always a lot of activity with the onset of winter migration.

Unfortunately the arrival of waterfowl has been slow and the numbers have been quite dismal. Even during the Salim Ali Birdcount in November, an annual exercise carried out by the club, at the Sukhna Lake, the number of ducks was very small and it was mostly Ruddy Shelduck. Hopefully the monthly survey of invertebrates in the lake can shed some light after 12 months of studying the trend. However it is notable that the low counts are not limited to Chandigarh region only, as even large wetlands at Pong Dam and Harike Pattan are reporting the same situation.

Chandigarh Bird Club was felicitated as Eco Warriors at a function held at DAV College sector 10 Chandigarh, which was very encouraging for the birders.

We continue to strive for the conservation of avian habitats in and around Chandigarh and hope that in the future we can do so much more for our avian population.

Happy Birding!

**Sarbjeet Kaur**

Secretary

Winter brings a delightful spectacle to avian enthusiasts as migratory birds embark on their annual journey from colder regions to the inviting landscapes of sub-tropical India. This seasonal migration significantly augments the resident bird populations across diverse habitats, fostering a vibrant and diverse avian community. Birdwatching hotspots come alive with excitement during this period, with enthusiasts eagerly anticipating the arrival of these winged visitors, injecting a dynamic element into the region's birdlife.

Adding a feather to their cap, the Chandigarh Bird Club (CBC) actively participated in an Eco Festival at DAV College on November 6th. This engagement exemplified CBC's commitment to environmental causes, as members showcased their passion for avian conservation.

As Diwali festivities unfolded on November 12th, drawing attention to the potential impact on birdlife, CBC members, undeterred, participated in the Salim Ali bird census on November 19, 2023. This census, a tribute to the renowned ornithologist Salim Ali, not only marked the celebration of his birthday but also demonstrated the club's dedication to scientific endeavors in understanding and safeguarding bird populations.

A notable field trip to Mote Majra was organized by the CBC on December 10th. This village pond and its surrounding habitat provide a suitable environment and food source for migratory avians during the winter season. The trip allowed members to observe and appreciate the regularly visited migratory birds, contributing to the club's ongoing efforts in avian research and conservation.

Furthermore, our CBC members conducted a monthly waterfowl survey on December 17th at Sukhna Lake and Dhanas Lake. This survey is a testament to the club's ongoing commitment to monitoring and understanding the local waterfowl populations, contributing valuable data to enhance our knowledge of the avian ecosystems in the region.

*Chandigarh Bird Club®***MONTHLY FIELD TRIPS: NOVEMBER 2023**

In November 2023, the field trip coincided with **Annual Dr Salim Ali Birth Anniversary Waterfowl Census and Species Count**, on 19th November 2023. This meant that the field trip was held at Sukhna Lake where 13 birders conducted a census. The lake was divided in 244 grids of 100 m x 100 m and resulted in 321 birds from 49 species, the least recorded number since the survey began in 2017. The greatest number of birds in this survey was 39 Indian Spot-billed Ducks, followed by 18 Common Moorhens and 18 Great Cormorants.



Honey Buzzard
Parveen Nain

*Chandigarh Bird Club®***MONTHLY FIELD TRIPS: DECEMBER 2023**

In December 2023, the field trip was taken to **Motemajra**, a village in Mohali district. The village boasts a lake which is home to a lot of waterfowl. The village has been part of CBC's most visited list for near a decade. Cold weather and fog meant that much was not visible but still, one could see the common birds like Ruddy Shelducks, Common Pochards, Mallards, Pintails, Grey Heron, Pond Herons, Purple Heron, Black-crowned Night Heron, Common Moorhens, Common Coots, Teals, Purple Swamphens, Knob-billed Ducks, etc. A total of 35 species, both waterfowls and arboreal, were observed.

**Indian spot-billed duck***Parveen Nain*



TRIP REPORT (DECEMBER) – CHOPTA/TUNGNATH

In the Quest for SNOW PARTRIDGE (8th December -13th December 2023)

Rima Dhillon

Chopta

The name conjures up the visions of Himalayan Monals strutting on snow covered slopes.



Kedarnath

An invitation to make up the numbers was all I needed to finally make the journey.

The trip was organized through Harilama and he had assigned a local lad Parbhat Bisht to guide us for the duration of the trip. As we were to realise during our trip Parbhat was a well Informed guide who would make that little extra effort to make our trip memorable. Pushkar Bali, Prof. Parmil and I took a cab from Chandigarh to Dehradun where we were joined by V Neeraja and the four of us transferred to the car driven by Dinesh, our driver for the next five days.



A four hour drive from Chandigarh and another six hours via Rishikesh and Rudraprayag on the Chopta/Pokahari Road we finally reached the village of Mandal our halt for the next two nights. Being at a height of 4000ft it was not too cold for early December and the stay at Alpine Hotel was very comfortable.



Mandal is very picturesque village and the go to hotspot for Scarlet finches and Golden Bush robin among a host of common and uncommon birds seen in the area. It has a habitat tailormade for several small arboreal birds.-mixed forest,shrubs, fields, Malta trees laden with ripening fruit turning a bright orange and the eternally soothing sound of a mountain stream flowing through the village. The mixed forest of tall pines and silver oaks hosted warblers, tits, flycatchers nuthatches, woodpeckers and treecreepers.



The secondary growth of thorny rosebushes were abundant with rosefinches, scarlet finches, streaked and chestnut headed laughingthrushes. A flock of White rumped munia sitting on the wall were quick to take flight at our approach! The agricultural fields had pigeons, doves, flycatchers and Sparrows breakfasting on grain and morsels exposed by tilled earth. Idyllic birding destination.



Rufous-bellied Woodpecker
- Pushkar Bali



Scarlet Finches in Mandal

A couple of kilometers along the road from the village there is a government run herbal research center... a haven for spotting woodpeckers. Rufous bellied woodpecker, Brown-fronted, Grey-headed and Himalayan Woodpecker all obliged with an appearances.



Notably Rufous-bellied Woodpecker was the frequently observed woodpecker in this area throughout the trip-an observation corroborated by Carol Inskipp with whom we happened to be sharing the homestay-not by design I might add!! It was wonderful to run into the Inskipp's at the dinner table that night.



The Herbal Research Centre has vegetation similar to Mandal Village with an abundance of rose bushes ideal for Rosefinches and we were there to try and locate Dark breasted Rosefinches but were out of luck. We were however able to see Black-headed and Eurasian Jays, Streaked, Chestnut-headed and Rufous-chinned Laughingthrushes along with the three species of Bulbuls, Black-chinned Babblers and Grey-breasted Prinia.



I had two lifers I was keen to tick though it wasn't giving me sleepless nights! So the following day we left for the Hotel Snowview located at the village of Pothibasso (translates to 'Abode of Birds') a few kilometers from Chopta. The reason for this change of location was the fact that spotting of Lifer no.1 Yellow-rumped Honeyguides was a certainty at Kakkadgad located closer to Potho basso than Mandal



Grey throated Martin

Kakkadgad basically is a crossing over a mountain stream with teashops near the bridge. Around a hundred meters walk up a bridlepath leading upstream ends up at a spot from where beehives are visible in a crevice of the cliff on the opposite side. The birds feed on the beeswax and leftover larvae in the abandoned hives. The advantage of this vantage point is that the birds keep flying to the branches of the huge tree close to the bridlepath enabling photographers to get closeup shots and the binocular holders to feast their eyes.



A short distance downstream the mountain stream joins the river. Grey-throated Martins, Spotted Forktails, Common Kingfisher, Brown Dipper, Plumbeous and White-capped Water Redstarts Chestnut headed Laughingthrushes and Black-chinned Babblers and a Wallcreeper flashing its crimson wings as it scaled up the cliff on its quest for food-all this while we sipped tea from the local dhaba.



Yellow-rumped Honeyguide



The extremely frisky and shy Chestnut-headed Tesia, however gave Pushkar a harrowing time before he could finally get one to perch in the open long enough for a clear photograph. I, on the other hand, didn't even attempt it!

**Chestnut-headed Tesia****Prof Parmil**

It was a 5.00 am start the next morning for Lifer no.2. It would be a 4km walk over black ice to see the beautiful Snow Partridges. They are known to venture down in winter to Chandrashila Pass, close to the Tungnath Temple.

Peaks of Kedarnath were soon awash with the pink tinge of dawn and the bird world was coming to life. The sound of our laboured breathing became a backdrop for the birdsong that surrounded us...whistling of the Blue Whistlingthrush, the chirping of Alpine Accentors as they hopped around garnering insects from little patches of grass that had managed to break through the snow cover, the loud call of the Winter Wren as it serenaded the dawn of a new day, flocks of Plain Mountain Finches flew in perfect unison.



Alpine Accentor

Rima Dhillon

The cold fresh crisp air was invigorating. As the sun came up we were suddenly aware of the presence of the show stoppers of Chopta-Himalayan Monal!!



Himalayan Monal

Prof.Parmil

A bird giving close competition to our national bird in the vibrance of its plumage. I could immediately understand the reason every birder worth their salt made this 'Monal Pilgrimage'.



They were all over the mountain and within touching distance! Nothing prepares one for the beauty of this bird from up such close quarters. Parmil and Pushkar were so mesmerized that over the next one hour they were oblivious to the snow and my pleas to continue onwards in case we were too late for the Snow Partridges. I wonder how they managed to process the million clicks once they got home!

The Altai Accentors along with a large flock of Plain Mountain Finches were perched atop a leafless tree which was, obligingly, on the verge of the footpath and we were able to take eye level shots of these high altitude avians.



Our oddly foursome lugging huge cameras was a source of much curiosity for many a tourist walking up to the temple for a frolic in the snow.



Altai Accentor

Onwards we climbed to Tungnath. Though the trail is not too steep, the climb to 11000 ft causes a little fatigue and shortness of breath. With numerous short halts the temple was finally within sight. According to Prabhat Bisht our guide, the snow covered slope to the left of the temple was the feeding ground of the Snow Partridges. The disappointment was acute. No Partridges in sight. All that effort!!



Prabhat was not to be daunted and he assured us that our effort would not be in vain. He planned to climb up the snowy slope above the temple and see if he could spot the flock which was always around. On our part we would have to meet him half way up. Unfortunately Neeraja was finding it difficult to climb further so decided to stay put at the bottom of the slope. Stomping our way up the fifty meters through knee deep snow seemed to take forever.



Snow Partridges.



Parbhat was soon back herding a flock of Snow Partridges ahead of him! Parmil and I had a hard time trying to fit them to our frames!! They even obliged Neeraja with closeups

We are grateful to Parbhat for going the extra mile to make the trip truly memorable for us and culminating it in such a grand manner.

The walk back down was no less difficult as we had to traverse the black ice once again and it was easier to slip now as we walked down the slope trying to tread as carefully as possible. Though the lifers were ticked the highlight was the whole experience of the trip in such wonderful company.





While the focus was on birding there were a few other highlights to this outing. While we waited in the snow for the Snow Partridges to show up we spotted a Red Fox ambling down the slope, on a hunt. We realized it was probably the reason that the Partridges had been spooked out of their usual feeding area.



Indian Red Fox

The Previous night at the Snow view hotel we were witness to the nocturnal feeding of a Himalayan Civet and a Porcupine. The hotel staff have been placing leftover food for the last several years and the civet is a regular visitor sometimes with its cubs. As soon as the food has been put out they beat a metal plate and right on cue the civet walks down the slope to gorge on whatever delicacies have been left out for it.

Civets are nocturnal and solitary animals. They forage at night and sleep during the day.



Himalayan Palm Civet

There seems to be a hierarchy here. The Porcupine will come down only once the civet is done feeding itself.

The Indian crested Porcupine is also nocturnal. It requires a minimum of seven hours of night time to forage for food.

It is monogamous and a herbivore.

It is protected under Schedule iv of the Indian Wildlife Act.

Both the Porcupine and the Civet demolished the leftovers voraciously.



Indian Crested Porcupine

On the approach road to Mandal we stopped at a particular spot which according to our guide is known as Monal Point.

A small flock is known to feed on the slopes below the road during the day and they cross the road to go up the hillside to their roosting areas. 'Flocks' of birders line up on the road for long stretches of time to capture that fleeting moment. We along with other birding groups followed this tradition and waited with cameras on the ready to snap our first photos of the Monals.



Time seemed to drag and finally we got the signal from the look out stationed on the opposite side of the valley that the Monal family had finally decided to call it a day and were moving up towards the road. After what seemed like ages, The patriarch finally crested the verge of the road and peered cautiously from behind the twigs, making sure it was safe for his family to emerge and make the final crossing. As he waited the birders held their breath with cameras on the ready. Quite sure their patience was about to be rewarded.





Suddenly at the last moment a car came whizzing down and the next thing we know the driver decided to blow the horn at all these weird people with cameras, blocking the road! And off flew the patriarch clucking at his harem of females down into the deep valley abandoning all hope of getting home that evening!.How the car and its driver escaped verbal lynching is a miracle!!As if to make up to us for our disappointment, a herd of Himalayan Tahr appeared on the slopes above and for the next half hour we satisfied ourselves with taking pictures of the herd.



Himalayan Tahr



TRIP REPORT (DECEMBER) – CHOPTA/TUNGNATH

In the Quest for SNOW PARTRIDGE (8th December -13th December 2023)



Parmil & Neeraja



Pushkar Bali



Rima Dhillon



Neeraja & Rima Dhillon



TRIP REPORT DESERT NATIONAL PARK, JAISALMER, RAJASTHAN (DECEMBER, 2023). *Munish Jauhar*

As a few of you might know by now along with being an avid birder I am an even more avid runner, to the extent a lot of my birding now only happens while I am running and I keep looking around for birds. Well earlier this month I had a race from Jaisalmer to Longewala, it was aptly titled the Border Race and I had signed up for the 100 miles' category (161.1KM).

The race happened over the weekend of 16th and 17th (Saturday/Sunday) December, 2023. I quickly did some homework on Google and found that DNP was a 45-minute taxi drive from Jaisalmer, so I planned to get into Jaisalmer on 15th (Thursday) and go for birding on Friday morning. The next step was finding a suitable guide and the first person I pinged was BKG Sir, he called back and gave me the reference of Ursa Khan. BKG Sir even spoke with him prior to my calling him and so that bit was also sorted. A big thank you BKG Sir!

I got into Jaisalmer on the 15th afternoon, had my Hotel arrange a cab coordinated with Ursa and was off on the 16th morning for DNP at 6AM. We met up with Ursa at 6:45AM and grabbed some tea/coffee and then I moved from my cab into a Bolero that Ursa had arranged for our visit. We had discussed about what all I would like to see and I had given him the Great Indian Bustard as the number one and probably the only item given the time constraints, everything else I spotted on top would be an extra.



A bit of context on the GIB Less than 100-130 individuals are left in the wild. The species is classified as critically endangered and is basically one step away from being extinct in the wild. Hunting and loss of its habitat were and are major factors. It is a large bird (males are about 4.5 feet tall, weigh up to 15 kg) with a horizontal body and long bare legs, giving it an ostrich like appearance. This species is the heaviest of the flying birds in India.

Anyways after purchasing our entry tickets we were in the park by around 7:15AM and it was still somewhat dark and a bit foggy and off we went. Ursa mentioned they had spotted 3 individuals the previous evening but at that point I did not know him well enough and I took it with a pinch of salt kind of like when you are looking for Tigers and the guide keeps showing you pugmarks and say's did you hear the call? The sun finally rose after 20 minutes and we were on our way. I honestly just enjoyed the whole setting and environment it was magical (picture below).



Sunrise



Spotted quite a lot of wild boars initially. Saw a few Egyptian Vultures next, this was the only species of vulture I saw that day but on numerous occasions. Gradually as I settled into the back seat of the Bolero I acclimatized and started spotting the commoners like the Variable Wheatears, the Great Grey Shrike, House Sparrows, Oriental Magpie Robin, Common Babblers, White-eared Bulbul, Green Bee-eater, Ashy-crowned sparrow-lark, Brown Rock Chat etc.

One of the first raptors we spotted and which also caused a bit of confusion in terms of its identity. It later turned out to be a juvenile Oriental Honey-buzzard with an amazing morph. The identity was later confirmed via Facebook (picture below).



Oriental Honey-buzzard (*Pernis ptilorhynchus*)



The first couple of hours pretty much flew by but unfortunately there was not much in terms of spotting raptors or the GIB. But then we gradually started seeing the raptors Tawny Eagle, Long-legged Buzzard, Steppe Eagle, Eastern Imperial Eagle. I had a picture perfect sighting of the Peregrine Falcon, but I guess the car pulled up too close and it flew off. I also managed some record shots of the Cream-coloured Courser and Black-crowned Sparrow Larks.

However, no GIB, fenced enclosures built in several parts of DNP enable a predator-proof area for the bustards to breed and forage, and are thus the ideal locations for sighting them. We pretty much covered all areas but no luck. In all honesty my hopes started dwindling. However, Ursa tried and tried we stopped at numerous locations wherein he looked far and wide, he then even moved to the roof of the car to get a better all around view. Seemed like it was not meant to be and finally at around 10:30 AM with a sense of disappointment we started heading back and almost got to the park entrance, when out of the blue he got a call from someone and he was speaking in an excited tone (in the local dialect) my hopes perked up. As soon as he finished he said one individual bird has been spotted outside of the fenced area and asked me if I had the time. I did not have much time but I said yes I have all the time in the world. The driver then next asked me to hold tight as we sped off it was around a 15-20-minute drive when we arrived at the spot. Initially I could not see the bird but then I saw it I got a few shots from a distance.



I was asked to maintain pin drop silence. Once I got a few record shots we decided to venture closer but unfortunately our tire got stuck in the desert sand and the car would not budge, both guys eventually got out of the car but the more they tried the more noise we made and the bird flew off so in that sense was lucky to see the heaviest flying bird in India in flight as well. We went around looking a little bit but then called it quits and headed back and my disappointment had turned to full blown happiness. The person from Ursa got the call was none other than his father who lived in a hut within DNP and he had seen the bird near their hut and his call to him was purely coincidental. As per him mostly all sightings of the bird are mostly within the confines of the fenced area, so this one was way out of that zone, God was indeed very kind.

A few species we spotted on multiple occasions but I unfortunately could not manage a single picture include the Long-legged Buzzard, Spotted Sandgrouse, Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse, Steppe Eagle. I also had numerous sightings of the Chinkara (*Gazella bennettii*) or the Indian Gazelle.

I would highly recommend Ursa Khan he is a spotter par excellence, patient and knowledgeable. His persistence was what finally yielded results. The DNP in itself is a vast area and it goes without saying one needs days to cover it and do justice but given my limitations of time I honestly have no complaints. I managed around 10 lifers in that short span of time.



- 1.Great Indian Bustard
- 2.Tawny Eagle
- 3.Eastern Imperial Eagle
- 4.White-browed Bushchat or Stoliczka's Bushchat
- 5.Desert Wheatear
- 6.Black-crowned Sparrow-lark
- 7.Spotted Sandgrouse
- 8.Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse
- 9.Cream-colored Courser
- 10.Great Grey Shrike

On a side note the main reason for my trip to Jaisalmer was the race, happy to share that I finished 5th overall and completed my 161.1KM race in 19:06 hours. This is a highly competitive race so I was on top of the world with the result.



Ursa on the car roof looking out for the GIB



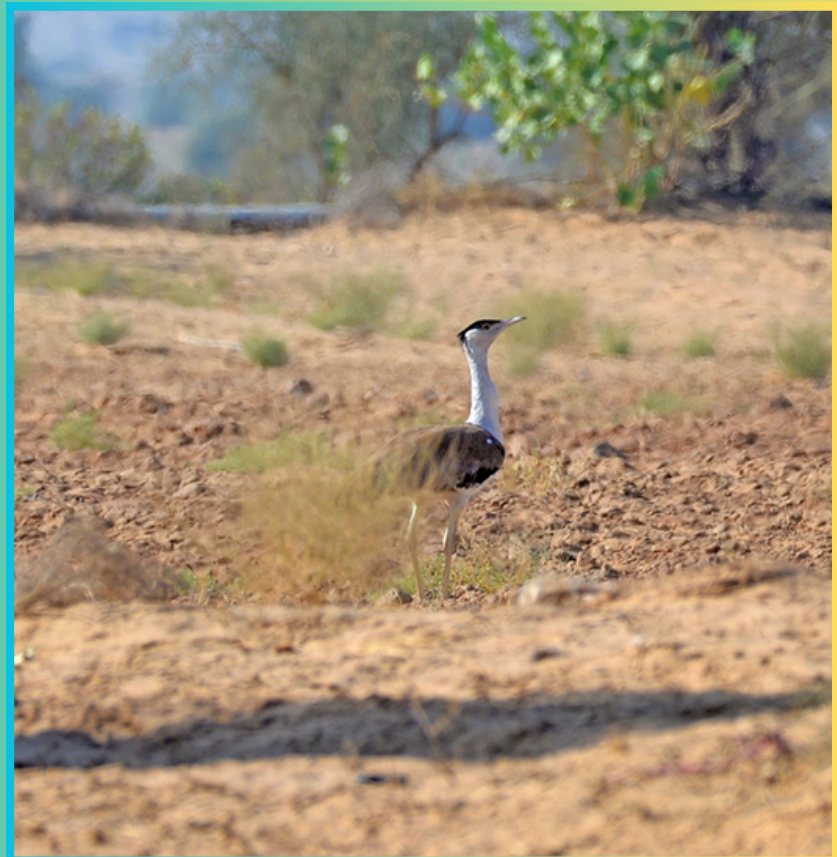
Tawny Eagle (*Aquila rapax*)



Eastern Imperial Eagle (*Aquila heliaca*)



White-browed Bushchat or Stoliczka's Bushchat)
(*Saxicola macrorhynchus*)



Great Indian Bustard (*Ardeotis nigriceps*)



Great Indian Bustard (*Ardeotis nigriceps*)



**A record shot of the Cream-colored Courser
(*Cursorius cursor*)**



**Chinkara (*Gazella bennettii*) or the
Indian Gazelle**



Some habitat shots at DNP



BIRDING TRIP TO EAGLENEST WILDLIFE SANCTUARY, ARUNACHAL PRADESH

By V. Neeraja and Prof Parmil Kumar

At a short notice, we planned our trip to Arunachal and Eaglenest Wildlife Sanctuary in the month of April from 2 to 11 ,2023 and fortunately we could get Mr Phurpa Tajaju as the bird guide. On 2 April, with high expectations and huge enthusiasm, we boarded our early morning flight from Chandigarh to Gauhati with a 45 min stopover at Lucknow. We landed at Gauhati airport at 10 a.m. From the airport, we took an hour break for a quick lunch and started for Arunachal which takes 8 hours to reach our first stop at Ramalinga Forest Rest house in West Kameng Dist. The road to Arunachal passes through Nameri National Park, Assam. This is one of the important locations where the White-winged Duck can be found. The Park is known for its rich bio-diversity and home to various species and wide range of birds. We stopped near Nameri National Park for a cup of tea at a roadside hotel and reminisced my (Neeraja) trip to Nameri last year in March for the White -winged Duck and the boat ride on Jia Bhoroli river. The distance from Nameri to Arunachal Pradesh border was around 3 hours drive. The landscape started to change from plains to hilly and mountainous landscapes as we drove further towards the border. The journey typically involves travelling through picturesque landscapes, including hilly terrains and lush greenery. This route passes through Tezpur in Assam and towards Dirang of Arunachal Pradesh.



At the border check post of Arunachal, we had to get our 'inner line permits' checked by the police officials and entry made in a register before moving ahead towards West Kameng dist. The road to Ramalinga is a scenic drive with some picturesque views of the hills and valleys. The sunset was very early and it was 8 p.m. and dark by the time we reached the Forest Rest House (FRH) at Ramalinga, near Lama Camp, where we were staying for the night. The drive for an hour was very tedious as the road was not visible due to dense fog. The road was also under repair with debris thrown on the sides. Our guide Phurpa was waiting at the FRH to welcome us and give the morning instructions to be ready by 5 a.m. to start our Day-1 of birding.



Plains of Assam, pic dated 02-04-2023



Border Check-post



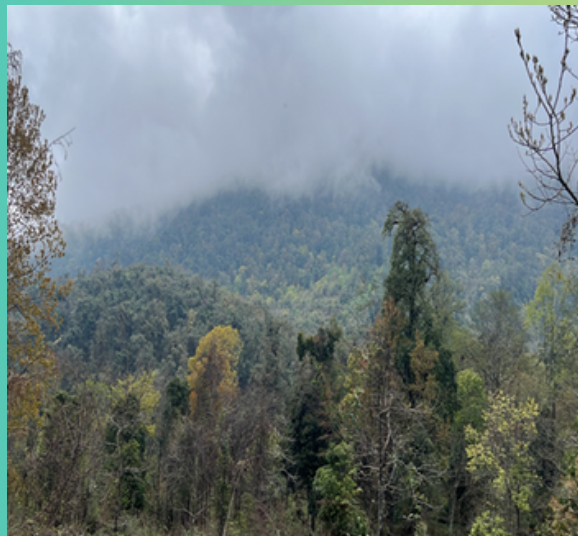
Day 1- We woke up to the sweet calls of the birds, got ready by 5 a.m., took our packed breakfast and started with high hopes to sight the famous Bugun Liocichla. There was a chill in the air as we drove to Singchung Bugun village community reserve, Glow Bari, which was less than a km drive from the FRH and near the famous Lama camp known for tented accommodation. We were hoping the day would be rainfree as it rained a lot on the previous day. Bugun Liocichla was the first bird species to be discovered in India after independence. This bird is critically engendered with less than 50-100 individuals found globally. The reserve is maintained by the local communities to preserve the habitat of Bugun Liocichla. We could sight 19 bird species at this location including Black-throated Prinia, Pygmy cupwing, Striated bulbul, Streak-breasted Scimitar- babbler, Grey-cheeked Warbler, Black-faced Warbler, Green-tailed sunbird, Rufous-bellied woodpecker, Yellow-cheeked Tit, Black-winged Cuckooshrike, Streak-throated Barwing, Beautiful Sibia, Golden Bush Robin, Gold-naped finch. We were disappointed for not sighting the Bugun Liocichla; after eating our packed breakfast, we collected our bags and by 11 a.m. moved towards Bompu camp. It was a bumpy 3 hours drive on the mud tracks through the deep forests of Eaglenest WLS.



**Singchung Bugun Village Community Reserve, Glow Bari,
dated 03-04-2023**



Olive-backed Pipit



Black- faced Warbler



**Streak-breasted Scimitar
Babbler**



To our dismay, it started to rain and our drive to Bompou was in misty and foggy conditions; it created a mystical ambience and most of the time felt like we were driving through clouds. The beautiful Magnolia flowers in full bloom gave an enchanting background to the lush green landscape all through the drive through Eaglenest lifting our spirits from the gloomy day. The Eaglenest is known for its rich biodiversity with a variety of plant species, rhododendrons and bamboos contributing to the unique ecosystem that supports numerous wild life species. During the brief spells of no rain we managed to do some birding and could sight 22 bird species including Black-headed Shrike babbler, Green Shrike Babbler, White-naped Yuhina, Stripe-throated Yuhina, White-tailed Nuthatch, Yellow-throated Fulvetta and Alpine Thrush. We braved the drizzle to get some good pictures of the birds sighted.





**View of Eaglenest WLS
dated 03-04-2023**



Yellow-throated Fulvetta

We reached the camp by 3 p.m. hungry and exhausted but were glad to see the sun out after the rain all way. We managed to get some lunch and quickly shifted into our tents for the night. We were staying here for 3 days. This Eco-camp is run by the local community in a sustainable way with basic amenities and with least impact on nature. There were 25 tents of good quality however the toilet facilities were basic as they claim the Elephants uproot the place during the months its closed. The rent charges were Rs 6,000 @ day with facility for twin or single occupancy. Hot water in a bucket was provided to all the guests. The food was very good to suit the palate of Indian and the foreign birders. We could see more foreigners than Indians in the tents around us. The electricity from the generator was provided only for a few hours till the dinner time. By 9 p.m., the generator is turned off and any charging of batteries has to done from sunset to dinner time. The tent had a solar powered lamp for light. It was fairly cold for April and we went to bed early as the sunrise is very early in this part of the country and birding starts by 5.00 am, next day. Sleep evaded as the tent felt very cold and in the middle of the night could hear the soft sound of rain.

**Tents at Bompou Camp- Eaglenest WLS , dated 03-04-2023**

Day 2: We started early with our guide Phurpa , did not forget to wear leech socks for the birding around the camp. Bompou camp is known for its avian diversity and is surrounded by thick forests, tall trees covered with lichens & vines and thickets of bamboos, reminds one of Eden where Adam and Eve lived or expect a Tarzan swing from a tree. We were lucky in the morning to sight 12 bird species including Little Bunting, White-spectacled warbler and Black-crowned Scimitar Babbler. There is no mobile connectivity of any service provider at the Bompou Camp. While we were birding, we could get some feeble connectivity 200 yards from the camp and got to know that our driver had lost a close family member during early hours and he had to go back immediately for the last rites. After making arrangements for getting his replacement, we planned to take the Kamengbari-Doimara road of Eaglenest WLS to Thelmara, District Dhekiajuli which is 3 & half hours' drive to Gauhati. It was a day of mist and very poor light for photography. We started our drive towards Doimara and also hoped to find some birds enroute.



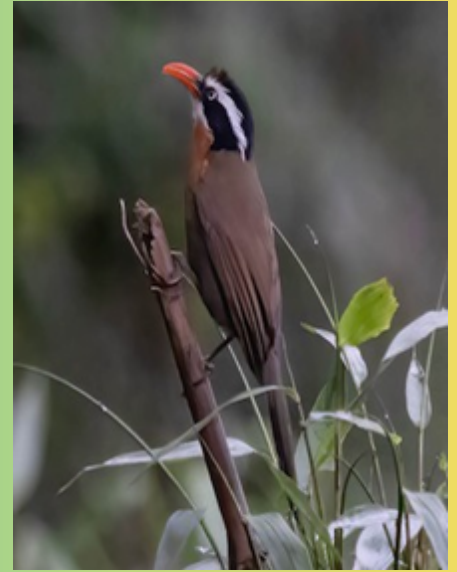
We could sight 22 bird species including Red-headed Trogon, Long-tailed Broadbill, White-eared Shrike Babbler, Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo, Common Green Magpie, Buff-barred babbler, Black Throated Tit, Long-tailed Sibia, Little Pied Flycatcher, Orange-bellied Leaf bird, Flock of Scarlet Finch. As we reached Doimara, we could sight 11 species of birds including Crested Goshawk, Besra, Chest-nut headed Bee-eater, Grey -backed Shrike, White-throated Bulbul, Black-crested Bulbul, Asian Fairy Blue-bird. We reached Thelmara by 12 noon and the new driver was already waiting to relieve our driver who has to proceed to be with his family. We picked up our new driver Minaj and started back to Bompou camp by 2 p.m. Interestingly, we realized that anyone who want to make Bompou camp of Eaglenest WLS as the first destination can take this route from Gauhati through Dhekiajuli which can be reached in 6 hours. The rice fields of Assam on both sides of the road gradually change into thick forest from Khellong, bordering Eaglenest WLS. On our way back, we could sight 22 bird species including Blyth's Paradise Flycatcher, Green-billed Malkoha and Red-breasted Parakeets. The road ended as we entered the WLS surroundings and merged with the narrow mud track. It is difficult and dangerous to drive in the dark after the sunset as the possibility of an encounter with herd of Elephants is high. Once we reached the camp, the first priority was to get our camera batteries charged; the dining hut had a shelf to the corner to facilitate charging points, which was not enough for all. Some birders had multi-point power extension box to charge their batteries.



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A bright morning view from Bompou camp side of WLS, dated 04-04-2023



Black- crowned Scimitarbabbler

Day 3: We started birding by 5 a.m around the camp and were lucky to get good shots of Sikkim wedge-billed Babbler (Black-breasted Babbler). Our bird guide Phurpa is an amazing guy with an uncanny sharpness for recognizing bird calls. His ability was astounding. After two hours of birding, we got back to camp for a quick breakfast and collected our packed lunch and set out deep into WLS area for birding on our vehicle. We stopped at many spots in the wilderness as and when we would hear the bird calls and that was far too many times. In 2 hours, we heard quiet a few bird calls and recorded 16 bird species including Golden-throated Barbet, flock of Grey-chinned Minivet, Short-billed Minivet, Sultan Tit, Yellow-cheeked Tit, Chestnut-crowned Warbler, White-naped Yuhina, Rufous winged Fulvetta, Black -throated Sunbird, Orange-bellied Leafbird, Asian-barred Owlet, Grey-cheeked warbler, Silver-eared Mesia, Red-tailed Minla, flock of White-crested Laughing Thrushes, a pair of Beautiful Nuthatch foraging on a lichen covered huge tree, Large Niltava



The activity was dull after 12 noon so we had our packed lunch and waited for an hour and after 2 p.m slowly started our drive back to the camp. On our return trip ,we recorded 22 bird species and heard the calls of Grey Peacock Pheasant and sighted Large Hawk Cuckoo perched on a branch close to the mud track, Crested Serpent Eagle, Collared Owlet, flock of Black-chinned Yuhina, Greater Necklaced Laughing Thrush, Streaked spider hunter and a pair of Khalij Pheasants. It was 6 p.m and dark by the time we reached the camp. After a good day of birding, my (Neeraja) two camera batteries were drained and my third battery incamera also had very low charge. On priority, I put one battery for charge. We had dinner and left the other battery on shelf requesting the early morning camp team to put it on charge. There was a spot in the camp which could catch the connection of Jio and BSNL network. It was the mobile point which was at a higher elevation in a corner of the camp. We spent some time at this spot every evening to catch up with the messages from home and also upload the bird lists on Ebird.

Rufous -bellied Woodpecker



Pictures from Eaglenest birding trip Bompou camp side with our guide Phurpa , dated 05-04-2023



Day 4: Today, after the morning birding we were to go back to Ramalinga FRH for the night. I (Neeraja) woke up early by 4 a.m for an early start as the toilet facilities were quite intimidating. I was also worried if my camera batteries were charged sufficiently. We left for birding by 5.30 a.m and spotted the Barred Cuckoo Dove and the Mountain Imperial Pigeon near the entrance of the camp perched on a high tree facing the valley. In two hours of birding, we could see 20 bird species including Great Barbet, Crimson-breasted woodpecker, Bay Woodpecker, Black-winged Cuckoo shrike, Maroon Oriole, flock of White-breasted Parrotbill, a huge flock of Rufous-winged Fulvetta, Himalayan Cutia. Our search for Blyth's Tragopan could not yield any success. We got back to the camp, packed up, had breakfast took our packed lunch and started our trip back to Ramalinga FRH. After a while, I realized my two batteries did not get charged and my third battery in the camera barely had any charge. I was totally stressed up. On way, we met another birder who was going to Lama camp directly without stopping enroute. I gave my battery charger and batteries to get them charged at Lama Camp. With barely any battery charge in my camera, all I could get is few shots of Chestnut-headed Tesia and on way sighted 13 bird species including Yellow-rumped Honey-guide, near the Eaglenest pass. The day started bright and sunny but as it progressed we had intermittent rain and overcast skies. We reached the Lama Camp around 3 p.m the batteries were still not charged and then we realized that the battery charger was not working. Our guide Phurpa learnt from other bird guides that 3-4 camera battery chargers of those who stayed at Bompu camp last night got damaged probably due to the voltage fluctuations of the generator.



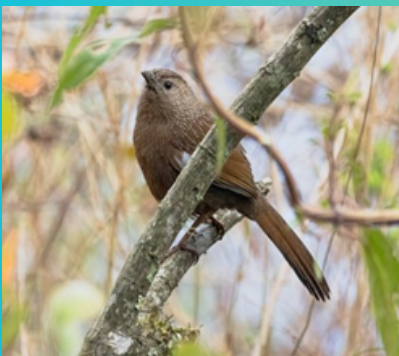
I (Neeraja) panicked, as all my three camera batteries were empty. I (Neeraja) made hectic calls for an hour trying to find a way to get a new Canon battery charger. Then a call to my birder friend Col Cheema (Retd.) saved the day. He shared a you tube link on how to charge Canon EOS R5 camera batteries directly with USB-C cable. Prof Parmil got his Laptop and used the USB-C cable which I was luckily carrying, and put one end to the Laptop and other end to the camera. To my great relief it worked and the camera battery started getting charged. It was already dark when we reached Ramalinga FRH and slept early with a happy feeling that the worse is over. We realized that one has to be prepared with alternative arrangements for any camera gear malfunctioning while going on such far-off birding trips.

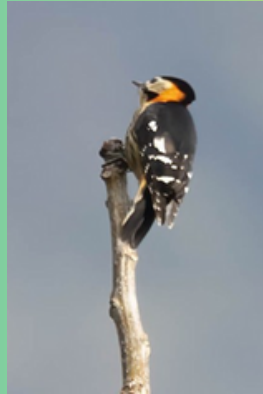


**Forest Department sign boards in Eaglenest WLS near the pass,
dated 06-04-2023**



Day 5: We were ready by 5 a.m with our packed breakfast to go to Singchung Bugun Community Reserve, Glow Bari to try our luck again to see the Bugun Liocichla. It is 15 min drive from Ramalinga FRH. On the side of the road, 200 mtrs from the gate, our guide could hear the calls of Bhutan Laughingthrush. We stopped and to our delight saw a large flock of Bhutan Laughingthrush moving in the bushes, making loud calls. We also saw Black-throated Prinia foraging in the bushes. As we entered the community reserve, we were welcomed with numerous bird calls and could spot 21 bird species including Spotted Elachura, Rufous -bellied wood pecker, Crimson-breasted wood pecker, flocks of Green-tailed Sun bird and Scarlet finch, Barwings. After spending nearly 3 hours, there was no call or sight of Bugun Liocichla. There were around 12 birders from 3 more bird tour groups looking for this critically endangered and elusive bird. By 11 a.m, we went back to FRH and thanks to our guide Phurpa's sharp sight we saw the Durian Redstart on the electric wires opposite the gate.

**Bhutan Laughingthrush****Rusty -fronted Barwing****Durian Redstart**

**Scarlet Finch****Green-tailed
Sunbird****Crimson-
breasted
woodpecker****Beautiful Sibia**

We packed and started for our next round of birding at Dirang at the Mandala top and Sela Pass. As we left the environs of Eaglenest WLS, we were overwhelmed by the ethereal feelings for the place, a birder's paradise and the rich bio-diversity is the protector of this Earth for future generations.

After reaching the ITBP guest house in Dirang at around 2 p.m., we took a moment to refresh ourselves with a soothing cup of tea. The scenic beauty surrounding the guest house was breath taking, setting the perfect tone for the rest of our stay there. Our main destination for the afternoon was Sangti Valley, where we were eager to catch a glimpse of the fascinating Long-billed Plover. The journey towards Sangti Valley was filled with anticipation and enthusiasm. Despite encountering a few potholes along the way, it did little to dampen our spirits. In fact, we had become somewhat accustomed to the occasional road challenges, considering the rugged terrain of the region. The journey itself became an adventure, with each twist and turn adding to the overall thrill of the experience.



Upon reaching Sangti Valley, the natural beauty of the surroundings was awe-inspiring. The serene atmosphere and picturesque landscapes created the perfect backdrop for our birdwatching expedition. Our guide Phurpa, took some time to locate the bird on the bank of Sangti river because of its small size and perfectly camouflaged in the boulders and riverbed stones. We were fortunate to witness the captivating Long-billed Plover in its natural habitat, a truly remarkable sight that made the journey all the more rewarding. Along with its other remarkable sighting was of Blyth's leaf warbler. In total, we sighted 14 species there which otherwise a small count as we could not explore the area around because of low light and shortage of time for next day early morning preparations

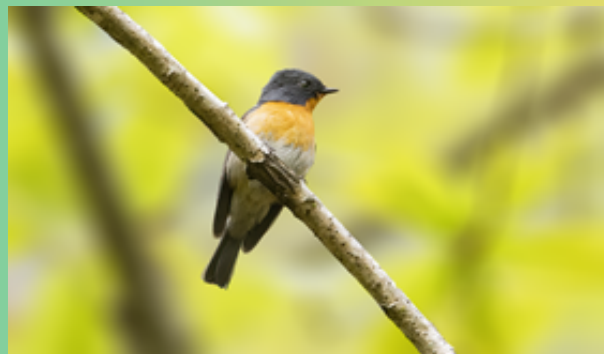
**Long-billed Plover****Habitat shot at Sangti valley,
dated 07-4-2023**

It was a hectic day but sighting of the Plover made it worth every effort. We got back to guest house by 6 p.m. and enjoyed a sumptuous dinner and requested the cooks to pack our breakfast for the early morning trip to Manda La Top.



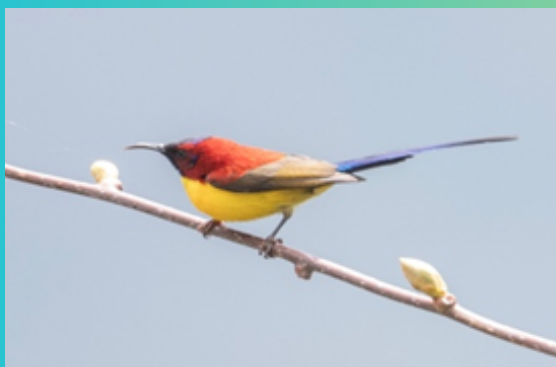
Day 6 : After last evening visit to Sangti Valley , our next day plan was to visit Manda La Top. This destination not only serves as an excellent spot for birdwatching but also stands as a remarkable tourist attraction as well. Perched at an impressive altitude of 10,000 ft, Mandala Top offers a breathtaking panoramic view of the surrounding mountains and landscapes. The journey itself is a thrilling experience, navigating through narrow, curvy roads that wind their way up the hills. The main highlight of Mandala Top is the series of 108 Buddhist stupas arranged in a circle atop the mountain. This sacred site adds a spiritual dimension to the natural beauty that surrounds it. The location is approximately 30 km from the main town and the journey, though serpentine and bumpy, takes no more than an hour to complete.

As we were visiting the place from birding point of view so our eyes remain focussed on seeing the birds around. And with the vigilant eyes of Phurpa , we were able to see around 40 species on the day.

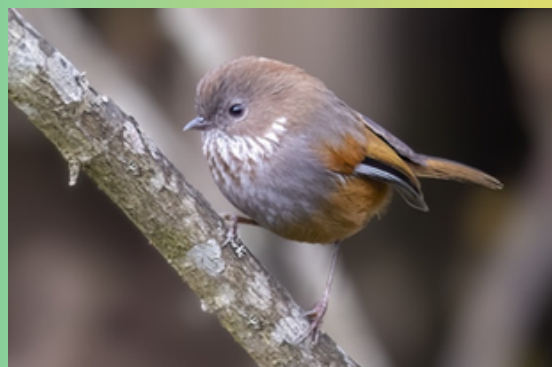
**Russet Bush Warbler****Slaty-blue Flycatcher**



Our first noteworthy stop was a small village on the Dirang -Morshing road. Despite its size, the village proved to be a rich habitat for birds. Remarkably, we were able to spot an impressive 40 species of birds in this location alone. Standout sightings included the Pale-blue Flycatcher, Russet Bush Warbler, Mrs. Gould Sunbird, and Hodgson's Redstart, each adding its unique charm to the birdwatching enroute. One aspect that truly impressed us, was the exceptional skill of our guide, Phurpa. His ability to identify bird calls with ease and accuracy showcased his profound knowledge of the local avian population. Other bird sightings include many variety of high-altitude birds, including Besra, Eurasian Nutcracker, Rufous-fronted Bushtit, Ludlow's Fulvetta, Rufous-winged Fulvetta, Rusty-flanked Treecreeper, and Sikkim Tree Creeper. Beyond its avian treasures, Mandala Phudung's forests are a sanctuary for plants with medicinal properties, rhododendrons, and diverse fauna, making it a site of utmost conservation interest.



Mrs Gould 's sunbird



Brown -throated Fulvetta



Eurasian Nutcracker



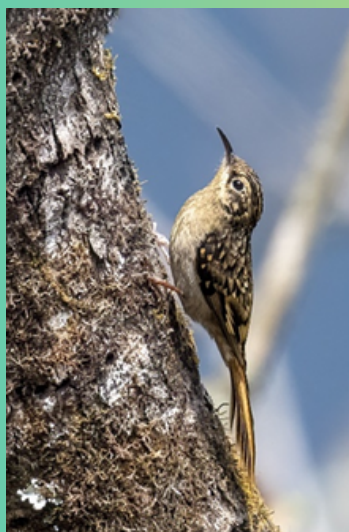
Rufous-fronted Bushtit



Rufous-winged Fulvetta



Chestnut-headed Tesia



Sikkim Tree Creeper



Day 07 : Our day began at the early hour of 4:30 a.m., setting out from the comfort of our guest house. The chilly morning air added a palpable sense of anticipation to our journey. Layered in warm clothes, we were determined to brave the sub-zero temperatures and catch sight of the elusive pheasants, making the excursion all the more exciting. Ascending towards Sela Pass, the brisk winds over our faces served as a reminder of the adventure that awaited us. The dedicated mess staff ensured we started our day right with a hearty packed breakfast – warm paranthas with pickle and hot tea. The combination of delicious food and the breathtaking landscapes around us set the stage for the day's birdwatching expedition. The ascent was gradual without many loops. The condition of the road was generally good and it was decently wide. There were a few muddy patches where the driving was a bit difficult but it was a gentle and pleasant drive. Sela pass is approximately 70 kms from the Dirang and it took us 2hrs 30 mins for us to reach there. Reaching Sela Pass at a jaw-dropping altitude of 13,800 feet, we found ourselves amidst a frozen wonderland. The transition in landscape, from verdant vegetation to frozen lake, was nothing short of spectacular.



The bone-chilling winds, characteristic of this high-altitude location, added an otherworldly beauty to our surroundings. To escape the biting cold, we sought refuge in the only makeshift dhaba where we enjoyed hot tea around a bukhari (hot chimney). The warmth of the tea, against the backdrop of frozen lakes and towering peaks, provided a cozy respite from the harsh cold. Despite the challenging conditions, our birdwatching endeavour proved to be immensely rewarding.

We were fortunate to spot 14 different bird species, including the vibrant Himalayan White-browed Rose finch and the Himalayan Beautiful Rose finch. A flock of Grandala soaring gracefully across the skies left us in awe of their beauty. Other notable sightings included the White-throated Dipper, Snow Pigeon, Common Shelduck, and Red-billed Chough, each showcasing the resilience and adaptability of these winged wonders in the harsh mountain environment. While we managed to tick off most of our lifers, the elusive Solitary Snipe remained hidden despite our best efforts.

**Common Shelduck****White-collared Blackbird****Himalayan Beautiful
Rosefinch****White-throated Dipper**



At the end of the day , our birdwatching adventure at Sela Pass was not only a challenge to our fitness but also a deeply satisfying experience. The journey was an exploration of the incredible avian diversity that thrives in the extreme conditions of high-altitude, frozen landscapes.

Day 8 : We started early at 6.00 a.m. from Dirang to Gauhati. It was a nice long drive of 8 hours. The road from Dirang to the Gauhati via Kalaktang was good and had beautiful views through valleys and villages. At one place near Kalaktang , we could see a forest fire on slopes of the hills. It seemed to be a man-made fire to clear the forests for agriculture. We were once again overwhelmed with our thoughts if the local communities will preserve this pristine nature which is also a carbon sink for our country. What should be role of other citizens, especially those who love the world of nature in preserving this 'Natural heritage' which Arunachal Pradesh has been bestowed by Earth. So many thoughts and anxieties troubled us on our drive back from Arunachal. We reached Guwahati by 4 p.m. and decided to go to the spot of Greater Adjutant, but could not reach the famous garbage dump before sunset due to the traffic. After a quick dinner at the guesthouse where we stayed for the night, we were ready for the next day morning flight back to Chandigarh.

Our birding trip to Eaglenest WLS and Sela pass was rewarding and mesmerising something that shall linger on for long on our minds and hearts and with sanguine feelings for the future generations.

<https://ebird.org/india/tripreport/118623>



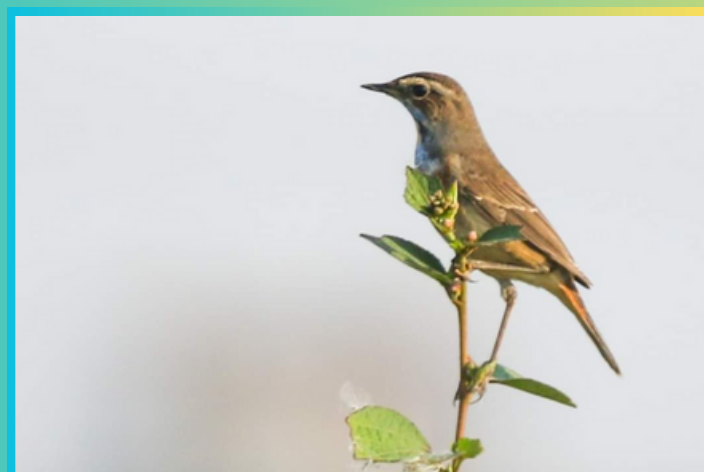
ARYAN BHALLA

Winters are my favourite season, but birding at 6 in the morning with chilly winds is the worst thing to do for me. Birding through cycling gave me a lot, either its encounters with lifers or cycling more than 5000 km on the outskirts of the city of Chandigarh.



This is my world, this is my forte- 'Birding' !

There are about 145 Species of birds, that migrate to the City during the winter season, with this total count for winter migrants in the areas just adjacent to Chandigarh lifers have been increased to 10.



Bluethroat spotted at Chappar Chirri, Punjab



A Variable Wheatear (Male) was seen in the Fields of Saketri, near Sukhna Lake

Winters were on the onset with the arrival of several varieties of winter Visitors like white Throated fantail singing in the backyard, frisky male and female black redstarts fighting with brown Rock Chats, Ferruginous ducks paddling in the water of Sukhna and other Migratory birds in the Region of Chandigarh ISCR were showing there presence too!





Birdlife in Chandigarh is quite colourful. Peacocks, pheasants in hills, parakeets, Babblers, Prinias and pigeons are some of the birds inhabiting the forests and wetlands of the city. Birds are known to adapt successfully to changes in the environment.



European Roller - A Passage Migrant, was a lifer for me this year, was recorded at Saketri too!

That's the reason they are considered 'barometers of changing conditions on earth.' We have only 4 months to do joyful birding along with our winter migrants and altitudinal migrants on their way to different regions of the city.

The onset of winter in Chandigarh signals a drop in temperatures, reduced daylight hours, and changes in food availability. These environmental cues prompt migratory birds to begin their journey to warmer regions.



Bluethroat (Female) at Saketri Fields.

The area where we live falls in a zone between severe winters and harsh summers on another side. So, here many birds stay for a very brief time. Some are passage migrants and some remain here till the end of March.



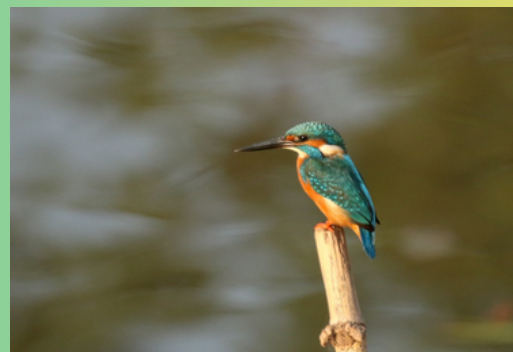
**Stork Billed Kingfisher at Sukhna Lake
regulator End (Distant shot)**

For resident birds, it signifies a shift in behaviour, such as increased foraging to store energy for the colder months. The atmospheric and environmental changes act as natural signals, influencing the behaviour and movements of birds as they adapt to the changing seasons.



Amidst the rustling leaves and cooler temperatures, the avian visitors find solace in the diverse habitats and welcoming green spaces, highlighting the interconnected dance of nature as it gracefully ushers in the colder months.

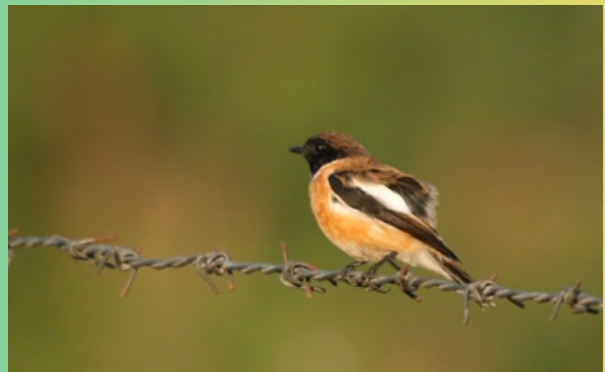
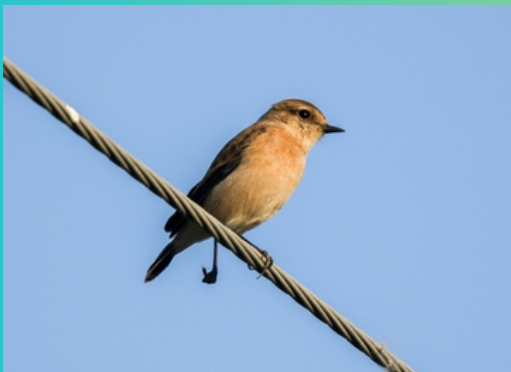
Heavy snowfall on the hills allowed the winter Visitors to come down in search of food It didn't even get sick that it couldn't be cured again. Bathing aquatic birds and drying their feathers like cormorants and darters – all this is beautiful.



Common Kingfisher and Pied Kingfisher (Both Residents) were seen after a gap of a year at the lake, along Stork Billed Kingfisher (Winter). Waders, Warblers, Waterfowls, ducks, tits etc. travel thousands of miles to reach the wintering grounds in India. One such place favourable to Birds is our City beautiful- Chandigarh!



Eurasian Wryneck in the fields of Saketri Village known for their distinctive appearance.



**Siberian Stonechat started arriving at
Chappar Chirri & Saketri also.**

It's Amazing to have a lot of birders and bird watchers in Chandigarh and Tricity as they are also a guide to the latest information for updates on new findings, habitats, & stuff. The most conspicuous route to achieve this was by interweaving the tangible dimensions of the natural world with the city's form.



In October, we even discovered the beauty of a pair of Oriental pied hornbills at the PGI hospital campus in Chandigarh, where we had a close look at them for several days!



After a long chase of about one month finally able to capture the beautiful couple in and around the surrounding areas of PGI Hospital, enjoying the figs and fruits.



Some residents also came up which are infrequently sighted: Chestnut-tailed Starling (Up) & Yellow wattled Lapwings (Down)

This majestic Yellow Wattled Lapwing is usually uncommonly sighted in Chandigarh, But, Saketri have an appreciable amount of them there. Usually, they need fellow land with no reeds, Thus, It seems that someone is scattering grains at Suketri grounds where kids play cricket which attracts them to those lands.



With our intention, as thinking a flock of great cormorants, darters, several types of will welcome you with several

An appreciable number of Siberian chiffchaff warbles and an exclusive Changeable Hawk Eagle was the bird of the day as another lifer at Lake at the end of November!



The city's green spaces and diverse habitats may attract migratory birds migration in Chandigarh, like in other areas, is typically triggered by seasonal changes, particularly changes in temperature and daylight. Many birds migrate to escape harsh winter conditions and find better food sources from Himachal and surrounding areas.



Take a moment to appreciate the wonders of nature in unexpected places, which also provide them with suitable resting and feeding grounds during their journey. Additionally, the presence of water bodies can be a significant factor, as birds often rely on these for feeding and roosting during migration.

Keeping an eye on these little birdies is not a tough task, but so much fun. It is comforting to see a wide migratory & the arrival of winter birds to Chandigarh, the possible breeding of large birds like storks, godwits, daggers, watercress, herons, warblers, etc.

Let us experience the hidden treasures of Chandigarh. Enjoy the diversity of our world!

“We keep on destroying the beauty of nature with pollution and nature keeps on trying to heal itself so that we can behold its beauty.”

May you hear the Birdsong Forever

Happy Birding!!

-By Aaryan Bhalla



Plain Janes



Purple Sunbird (Nectar Love)
Anuj Jain



Taiga (Female)
Parveen Nain



Black Redstart
Lalit Bansal



Ashy crowned Sparrow lark (female)
Munish Jauhar



Black crowned night heron female
Parveen Nain



Oriental Magpie-robin
Anuj Jain



Russet Sparrow female
Munish Jauhar



Common Stonechat
Munish Jauhar



Pied Bushchat female
Munish Jauhar



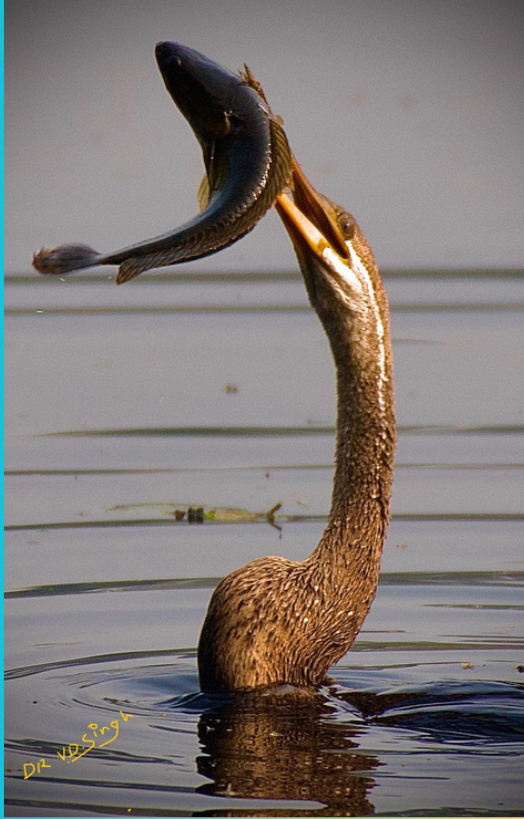
Common Stonechat
Lalit Bansal



Purple Sunbird
Anuj Jain



Red Avadavat females
Rima Dhillon



DARTER

V.D. Singh



Barn Owl Shikha Sharma



Purple Sunbird

Jabir S.Randhawa



Golden Moments

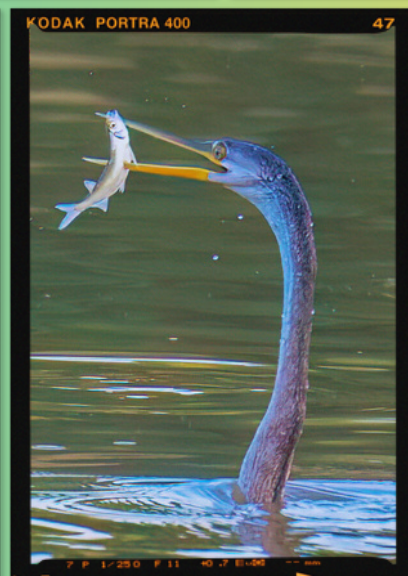
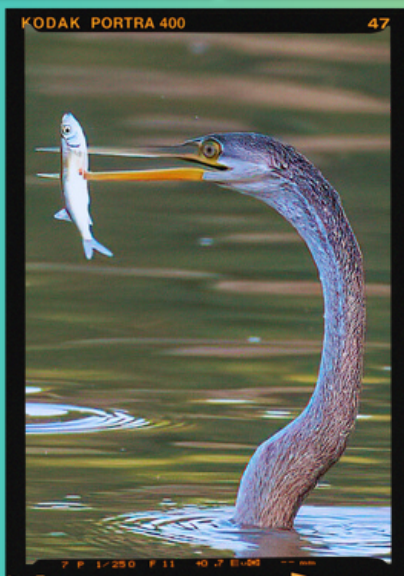
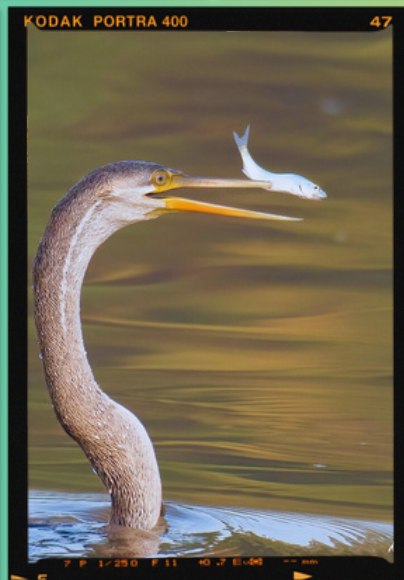
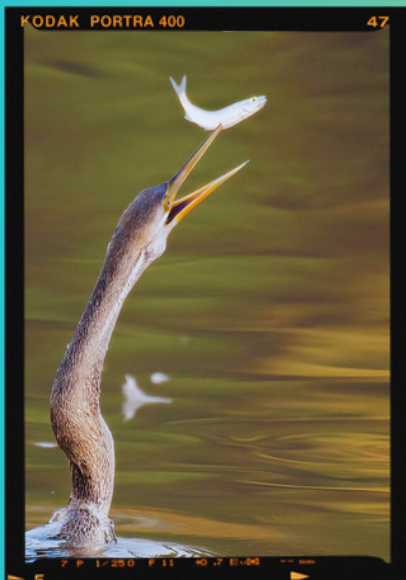
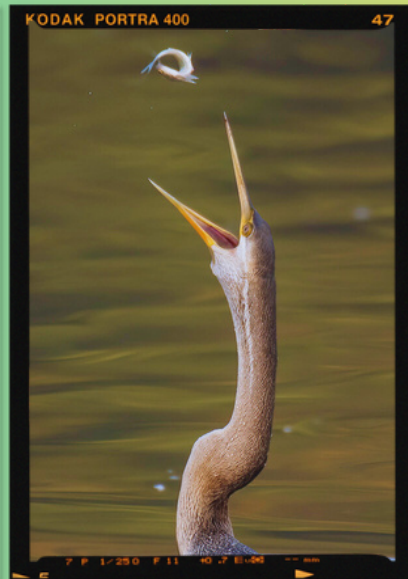
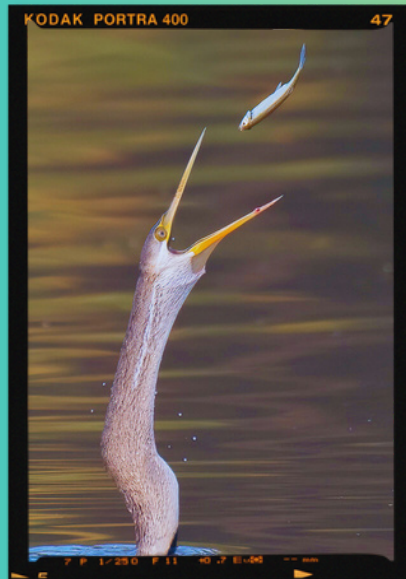
captured by: Anuj Jain





Oriental Darter in Action “Sukhna Lake, Chandigarh”

Clicked by: Parveen Nain





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 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 it 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 related to this activity.

President :- **Rima Dhillon**

Vice President :- **Narbir Singh Kahlon**

Hony Secretary :- **Sarbjeet Kaur**

Joint Secretary :- **Navjit Singh**

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